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# Educational Partnerships in Mennonite Communities

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**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**

**Educational Partnerships in Mennonite Communities**

**by**

**Paul Charles Bennett**

**AN ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

**SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE**

**DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

**LONDON, ONTARIO**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is to increase the number of Mennonite students who register in a school division located in western Canada by creating a social justice perspective for Mennonite students amongst divisional staff.

By accepting the challenge of this OIP the school division will seek to better understand the cultural and religious needs of the various Mennonite groups living within the division's catchment area. Hopefully, schools can make changes to policies, practices, and structures resulting in increasing numbers of Mennonite families feeling comfortable registering their children in the division's schools. School board trustees and school and divisional administrators will need to understand the history of why Old Colony Mennonites (OCMs) have been avoiding public education for generations. By understanding history school board trustees and school and divisional administrators will be able to communicate to school staffs, students, parents, and community members the need to make accommodations for OCM families so they feel comfortable registering their children with the school division. It is imperative that the division come to an understanding that a social justice perspective will be required to bring as many Mennonites as possible to the school division. In order for Mennonite families to see our school division as their first choice for education of their children it is necessary to make accommodations at schools and defend those accommodations in the face of public scrutiny.

If the school division wishes to remain true to its vision of being first choice for students, school board trustees, school and division administrators, school staff, current students, parents and community members need to be open to schools becoming more accommodating for Mennonite families.

*Keywords:* Mennonites, OCMs, history, culture, religion, accommodations

## **Executive Summary**

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) focuses on a small, publicly funded, rural school division in western Canada. It provides solutions for a Problem of Practice (PoP) which centers on attracting Mennonite students to register in the division's schools to offset a significantly declining student enrolment problem that has existed for well over two decades. Chapter 1 includes a brief organizational history and contextual information which explains why the population has declined so much over the years. Bolman and Deal's (2013) frames are used to further illustrate the structure of the division and to explain why the OIP is suitable to this division. The leadership approach used to address the PoP entails a combination of the radical humanist and radical structuralist paradigms as underpinnings of the critical perspective. A critical stance will lead all divisional leaders in adopting the social justice perspective for Mennonite students and their families.

Chapter 2 includes a critical organizational analysis which utilizes Bolman and Deal's (2013) assumptions in the political frame along with corresponding issues in the division's Mennonite communities. The analysis is followed by a force field analysis (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016) used to diagnose and analyze organizational problems that exist in either the division or in school communities where educational partnerships with Mennonites are desired. Four possible solutions to the PoP are suggested with a hybrid of two being the chosen solution. By providing accommodations for Mennonite students and their families, the division should be able to increase the number of part-time and full-time student registrations in division schools. Authentic leadership will be modelled throughout this OIP so that all stakeholders are more likely to commit to the necessary changes required in schools to attract and retain Mennonite students and their families.

Chapter 3 outlines a plan for implementation, evaluation, monitoring, and communication of this OIP. Kotter's (1996) 8 Step Change Model should both ensure that the change plan is successfully implemented as well as meeting the cultural and religious needs of Mennonite students who register in the division's schools. As the change leader I will need to consider assumptions, action steps including timelines and resources, factors that will build momentum, and the limitations of this OIP. By aligning Kotter's 8 Step Change Model and the PDSA Cycle (Moen & Norman, 2009) the change process in this OIP will be able to be monitored and evaluated. Ethical leadership is very important in any organizational change and a combination of Starratt's (1991) ethics of justice, critique and care will be used to lead change in this OIP. A comprehensive communication plan influenced by Armenakis & Harris' (2002) five change message components and Klein's (1996) communication principles will guide communication throughout this OIP.

Careful following of this plan should ensure that the division's student enrolment is increased while also meeting the educational needs of Mennonite students living within the division's catchment area.

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## **Glossary of Terms**

Bourdieuian Theory – Social theory informed by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. It suggests that by studying theory other than specifically education, one can learn about education. While studying Mennonites and public education one can learn by studying Mennonite culture.

Catchment Area – Geographical boundary for North Trail School Division (NTSD).

LGS – Low German Speaking (Mennonites).

NNS – Near North School which is a pseudonym for the predominately Mennonite school in North Trail School Division (NTSD).

NTSD – North Trail School Division. This is the pseudonym for the school division which is the subject of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP).

OCMs – Old Colony Mennonites. The most traditional Mennonites who immigrated to Canada from a Dutch-Russian Background.

Privilegium – A Mennonite formal understanding with the federal government that not only guaranteed Mennonites religious freedom and exception from military service, but also the right to educate their children in a manner befitting their customs and beliefs (Bowen, 2010, p. 552).

Rhineland Mennonites – A group of Old Colony Mennonites who have broken away from the traditional Old Colony Mennonites.

School Utilization Rate – The provincial government rate for school space calculated by dividing the total school instructional area capacity by the student enrolment.

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## **Chapter One – Introduction and Problem**

### **Organizational Context**

The school division that is the focus of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is a small, public funded, rural school division in western Canada. For the purposes of anonymization, the school division will be referred to throughout this OIP as North Trail School Division (NTSD).

The mission statement for this school division is “Learning together, success for all”. The vision of this school division is “First choice for students: We are a dynamic learning community focusing on student success”. These two foundational statements provide overall guidance for this OIP as the school division seeks to increase the number of Mennonite children enrolling in its schools. By increasing the number of registered Mennonite students in our schools we will be making greater progress on ensuring that all students are learning together and experiencing greater success. Increasing numbers of Mennonite families choosing to partner with NTSD for educational reasons will be one indicator that these families view our school division as a first choice for their students.

Over the last several years NTSD has experienced 2% annual student enrolment declines. Due to such student enrolment decline, it would be helpful to attract increased Mennonite student registrations. Registering Mennonite students also provides an opportunity for Mennonite students to receive an education that their parents may not have received because of historical, cultural, and religious reasons.

## **Organizational Structure**

NTSD is a publicly funded school division administered out of a central office located in North Trail, western Canada. NTSD consists of approximately 3040 K-12 students in 20 schools and 11 communities dispersed over 12,000 square kilometers. NTSD currently employs over 500 staff members, which include teachers, principals, central administration staff, support staff, maintenance staff, transportation staff and bus drivers.

NTSD is governed by seven elected school board trustees who have one employee, the Superintendent of Schools. The Superintendent of Schools reports directly to the Board of Trustees. All other staff reports directly or indirectly to the Superintendent of Schools as per administrative procedures that are specific to this school division. For the purpose of maintaining anonymization the administrative procedures are not included.

NTSD recognizes site-based decision making (SBDM) as an organizational approach which expands the local site responsibility and improvement of its performance. SBDM includes a school and its community having the authority and the support to make decisions which directly impact on the education of students and shall be accountable for results. The SBDM model reflects the integral relationship between teaching, learning and the decision-making process.

NTSD has a k-12 school, Near North School (NNS) (a pseudonym) in the community of Near North (a pseudonym). This year one hundred fifteen students have enrolled at NNS. Two years ago, there were eighty students enrolled at the Near North Private School and thirty-eight homeschoolers who were registered with other willing non-resident boards. Anecdotally, several Near North residents have commented to the author that there are many other school aged children who are neither registered at the Near North Private School nor as home-schooled

students. Further investigation is required to validate such comments from Near North residents. If these student numbers are still accurate in Near North, it will be well worth it to further explore why parents don't choose our NTSD school for their child's education and establish strategies to bring them into the division.

## **Organizational History**

Using Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame, human resources frame, political frame and symbolic frame, I now discuss the division's organizational history as it is relevant to this OIP. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that "a frame is a coherent set of ideas or beliefs forming a prism or lens that enables you to see and understand more clearly what goes on from day to day" (p. 41). Through considering each frame, the reader will gain greater insights to NTSD.

The structural frame places an emphasis on structure, hierarchy and role (Bolman and Deal, 2013). It includes goals, tasks, technology, planning, specialized roles, coordination and formal relationships. There is a tendency to see the world rationally with an emphasis on organizational architecture (pp. 15-16). One recalls the amalgamation of NTSD with a smaller school division, South Trail School Division (a pseudonym) in January, 1995, and at that time we had 4067 students. As already mentioned the current NTSD student enrolment is 3040 which represents a 25% drop in student enrolment since amalgamation. In total five NTSD schools have closed due to declined student enrolment. Based on this information it is obvious that declining student enrolment is an issue for NTSD.

NTSD has a long history of being governed by entrenched policies. Many trustees and executive staff see policy as a function of the structural frame being very significant in the operation of the division. This can be an impediment to adopting necessary change within the

division. For example, recently the Board of Trustees approved registering Mennonite students outside their catchment area with the condition that parents transport their children because providing divisionally approved transportation was not consistent with policy. Policy dictated an educational decision instead of the decision being made on educational grounds.

On July 1, 2016 NTSD switched to a policy model consisting of 20 Board Policies down from hundreds of policies. The Board also adopted an Administrative Procedures Manual which supplements Board policies. The new Board Policy Handbook was developed to highlight and support the Board's important governance function. This switch also clarified the role of the Superintendent of Schools and the delegation of authority from the Board to the Superintendent of Schools. The Administrative Procedures Manual is the primary written document by which the Superintendent of Schools directs staff. The development of two separate and distinct documents is meant to reinforce the distinction in the division between the board's responsibility to govern and the Superintendent of School's executive or administrative procedures.

The human resources frame focuses on people and relationships. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest "the human resource perspective, rooted in psychology, sees an organization as an extended family, made up of individuals with needs, feelings, prejudices, skills, and limitations" (p. 16). Unlike the structural frame, as educational leaders we tend to look beyond all the organizational layers and focus on how people in our divisions interact. Some of our basic assumptions would be the school division exists to serve the needs of our students, parents and staff. There is interdependence at play. The division needs ideas, energy and talent while its staff needs careers, salaries, work opportunities and involvement in meaningful activity. When OCM parents approached me in August 2016 to discuss an educational partnership they mentioned that they were encouraged to connect with NTSD because they had heard we had worked with NNS to introduce High German language instruction at NNS. High German is

important to OCM parents as it is the language used in their worship. The parents were aware of the great relationship that the senior staff had established with parents and community members at Near North. This is evidence that building confidence of the Mennonite parent community is important.

A political lens is often focused on issues of coalition, conflict and power. Organizations viewed through this lens are seen “as arenas, contests or jungles. Parochial interests compete for power and scarce resources, conflict is rampant because of enduring differences in needs, perspectives, and lifestyles among contending individuals and groups” ( Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 16).

In September 2016 ninety-one students from Old Colony Mennonite (OCM) families registered at one of the division schools and agreed to follow the provincial program of studies and it is reasonable to predict that other Mennonite families may also be willing to register in the future. As a condition of registration, the parents requested and were accommodated in having separate classes for their children along with daily devotional time as well as daily High German language instruction. The OCM parents had enduring differences in needs, perspectives, and lifestyles and we were able to accommodate them in a public school. These extra ninety-one students are included in a NTSD student enrolment increase of 3.6% from last year. This is a clear indication that with continued increases in Mennonite students registering, NTSD can increase its student enrolment throughout the division.

As suggested by Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols (2015) NTSD has “network power” (p.187) in informal relations with the people at Near North and they have acquaintances in other areas of the division. Network power is defined by Cawsey et al. (2015) as the power people have through their connections across both small and large areas (p. 187). As a Superintendent of

Schools, it has also been important to inspire trust and enthusiasm resulting in what (Cawsey et. al, 2015, p. 187) would call “personality power”.

The symbolic frame incorporates myths, stories, rituals and metaphors of an organization. Within the symbolic frame there is emphasis on symbols, meaning, belief, faith, culture, ceremonies, play, and shared values (Bolman and Deal, 2013). As educational leaders it is very important for us to pay careful attention to the symbolic frame as it provides great cohesion and stability within our schools and school divisions. It will be important to carefully consider the symbolic frame as faith, symbols, meaning and culture are very important to each respective Mennonite community. Trustees and various divisional staff are somewhat aware of Mennonite culture and faith and if we are to increase educational partnerships with Mennonites it will be necessary to increase awareness of the educational needs, customs and traditions of the Mennonite community.

Just over two years ago trustees voted to discontinue a long-standing practice of enabling the distribution of the Gideon’s New Testaments in the interest of not favoring one faith perspective in NTSD. Trustees wrestled with the decision to allow the OCM group to register because they felt they were being contradictory to their decision with the New Testaments. For now, trustees are choosing to view the importance of the symbolic frame with respect to Mennonites as a precedent over their decision to discontinue distribution of the Gideon’s New Testaments.

Bolman and Deal’s (2013) four frame model has some limitations in that it is limited to four frames and other perspectives of NTSD may be left out. To offset any limitations a detailed description of the leadership framework (with particular emphasis on a critical stance, social justice perspective and authentic leadership) for the problem of practice (PoP) relating to increasing Mennonite student enrolment in NTSD is discussed.



## Leadership Problem of Practice

The PoP investigated in this OIP is how NTSD will strategically address its student enrolment decline and advocate for Mennonite student education by successfully working with the local Mennonite communities to ensure that NTSD is meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Mennonite population within its school system. Mennonite history tells us that Mennonite groups prefer to isolate themselves for schooling purposes (Good Gingrich, 2013). The *Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, Opening Doors, Migrations* (2014) notes that in the eighteenth century, Prussia commenced imposing restrictions on Mennonites living in Poland because of their unwillingness to participate in military action. This caused many Mennonites to migrate to Russia where Catherine the Great was offering free land in Russia's newly acquired Ukraine. In an effort to protect their distinctive life the Mennonites negotiated military exemption, the right to continue their colony settlement patterns, and the right to educate their children in a manner consistent with their culture and religion (p. 2).

Bowen (2010) traces the Alberta government's efforts to establish public schooling in La Crete while focusing on resistance from OCMs and compromises made by Mennonites and government. Mennonites were newcomers to La Crete in the 1930s and they saw the isolation as an escape from public schooling. As the population in La Crete grew, the provincial government decided to try to enforce public education. While some OCMs accepted public schooling as they saw the necessity of learning to speak English and attaining a high school diploma, many families resisted public schooling. There are lessons to learn from the La Crete example so that Mennonite parents are not encouraged to flee from potential educational partnerships with public schools. It is important to ensure that parents have significant input into any educational partnerships established with Mennonites.

Mennonites have been running from public education for centuries as suggested by Bowen (2010):

When Mennonites arrived in Canada in the 1870s they signed a formal understanding, or Privilegium, with the federal government that not only guaranteed them religious freedom and exemption from military service, but also the right to educate their children in a manner befitting their customs and beliefs. The most important component of this agreement declared that the fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites without any kind of molestation or restrictions whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools. (p. 552)

This clarifies why the establishment of relationships is necessary prior to discussions around partnering with Mennonites in public education. The PoP seeks to identify how to partner with Mennonites to provide education services while maintaining their religious and cultural beliefs. The OIP is focused on learning about Mennonite history, culture and religion so that successful partnerships leading to increased Mennonite student enrolment can be achieved in NTSD.

A radical humanist and radical structuralist view frames this PoP. Hartley (2010) suggests that within a radical humanist paradigm one is concerned with “gathering and using experiences to improve practice” (p. 275). By understanding what Mennonites find offensive NTSD will become more knowledgeable of accommodations necessary to attract parents to register their students in our schools. Burrell & Morgan (1979) suggest radical humanism is concerned with overthrowing or transcending limitations of existing social arrangements (p. 33). This paradigm also subscribes to radical change and emancipation from a subjectivist standpoint which enables reflective review of Mennonite culture and timely response to the various cultural needs of the diversified Mennonite groups. Through the radical structuralist paradigm we tend to

see the world from an objectivist standpoint. Like the radical humanist paradigm, the radical structuralist paradigm subscribes to radical change and emancipation but within a context of structural domains instead of humanist domains (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As NTSD leaders learn about various Mennonite cultural and religious practices existing in NTSD's catchment area we will determine elements of NTSD's culture that prove offensive to Mennonites. As Mennonite religion sets their followers apart from the rest of the world (Good Gingrich, 2016), in order to enrol their students in our schools, we must be willing to modify existing school structures to accommodate their religious and cultural needs.

Neoliberalism and conservatism are also useful lenses through which to view this PoP. Ryan (2012) suggests that neoliberalism is an effective and efficient ideology to changing schools as it is an approach consisting of market principles (p. 23). When first embarking on framing this PoP and operating from a neoliberal perspective, this writer was driven by market economics as a part of neoliberalism in that NTSD has struggled with declining student enrolment for well over two decades with the economic consequence of decreased funding. The initial motivation to register Mennonite students was because they usually don't enrol with us and they are a population who seem to be increasing. Neoliberalism is also characterised by accountability, well developed policy and structured routines which is very typical of NTSD's structure and organization. As suggested by Gutek (1997) "Conservatism is distinguished by its tendency to preserve established institutions and conditions" p. 196. Some of our trustees and senior management staff may resist some of the accommodations requested by Mennonite communities as such accommodations require change to school and divisional structures, policies and procedures that have been in place for a long time. As Conservatism is so strongly entrenched in NTSD it will be beneficial to continue to view any required changes from the Conservative perspective in order to ensure support from those supporters.

Radical humanist and radical structuralist paradigms are underpinnings of the critical paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Faubert (2016) suggests the critical paradigm “is grounded in the belief that social change can be achieved through the emancipation and transformation of individuals and society” (p. 1). He further suggests that leaders require great commitment to social justice and transformative change. Traditionally, NTSD has not had anyone advocate for Mennonite students and their families. Shields (2014) suggests that there is a need for more transformative leaders who are prepared to actually transform their schools. Leaders must ask whether their schools are actually meeting the needs of all students. They need to ask whether they are writing off students who come from historically less dominant socioeconomic, religious, or ethnic groups or whether all students are actually achieving to similar high levels (p. 324). Representing the administrative leadership of this board and facing potential political and social pressure from the Board of Trustees and the general public for the potential perception of catering to a specific population, I use a critical lens to address this PoP.

Leadership from a critical perspective rather than a neoliberal perspective is more appropriate because many Mennonites have negative perspectives about public education. Many Mennonite parents have had limited to no access to public education so it's a source of intimidation for them. Many Mennonite communities would benefit from a school division that truly understands their history, culture, and religion and is genuinely concerned about their educational well-being.

Eacott (2013) explains how educational leadership needs to progress to theorising leadership from that of just examining educational practice. He further advocates that research drawing on Bourdieusian theory (informed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu) offers insights and understanding not available in other research (p. 185). During implementation of this OIP it will be beneficial to be guided by the Bourdieusian theory in order to more deeply connect with

the various Mennonite communities. The Bourdieusian theory is quite fitting as Mennonites are not open to outsiders encroaching on their homeschooling practices or their private schools. This perspective, particularly within a Mennonite culture, presents great potential for eventually being able to understand the varied Mennonite groups leading to hopefully increasing Mennonite student enrolment.

The relevance of authentic leadership has become very clear in the preparation of this OIP. Avolio, Chan, Hodges, and May (2003) describe authentic leadership: “As a positive construct, descriptive words include genuine, reliable, trustworthy, real and veritable” (p. 248). One of the main reasons members of the Mennonite church congregation approached senior management was because of our reputation as authentic leaders demonstrated by earlier success in one of our schools where the majority of students registered are Mennonite. As Alavi and Gill (2016) suggest “authentic leadership may contribute to the implementation of complex change when change success requires continuous effort, hope, and resilience by change agents, especially because of failures and iterations that may occur during complex change” (p. 168). Through working with Mennonite groups, it is evident that it is important for Mennonite followers to be convinced of a leader’s authenticity and that trust has been established. Through authentic leadership it is expected “that authentic leaders will influence follower self-awareness of values/moral perspective, more based on their individual character, personal example, and dedication” (Avolio and Gardner, 2005, p. 330). These traits are evident in the leadership/follower example existing at the school where ninety-one Mennonite children have recently registered. Through the OIP process, I value the opportunity to hone my own authentic leadership skills. Authentic leadership can be very time consuming and in order to mitigate against the significant time investment, distributed leadership, as discussed below is supportive of authentic leadership.

As a support to authentic leadership, the ability to distribute leadership will be useful in fully realizing authentic leadership in many different communities. Diamond (2013) defines distributed leadership in two ways:

The leader-plus aspect emphasizes that leadership involves multiple actors who participate in leadership practice. The practice aspect highlights that leadership occurs through an interactive web of leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation including tools and organizational routines (p. 85).

Both aspects are relevant to our current Mennonite communities because leadership is distributed to multiple actors at both the school and in the community, church, cultural traditions and practices. In the most recent example where ninety-one Mennonite students have registered, leadership is distributed with two superintendents of education elected by the church congregation, the school principal and the staff. If we are to encourage more parents to register their students in our schools we need to distribute more of the leadership to them. This is supported by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) when they suggest that if expertise is distributed the school's expertise gets developed rather than just the leader (p. 27). If a school staff doesn't develop advocacy for Mennonites then the principal will be limited in their capacity to cater to the educational needs of Mennonite students and their families. As suggested by Harris (2013) we will need to focus primarily on cultivating and supporting patterns of distributed leadership practices that are most likely to result in improved organisational performance. NTSD would do well to improve its performance by becoming more responsive to Mennonite culture and religion and this can be achieved by sharing the leadership of education of Mennonite students with Mennonite people.

Framing the PoP with the integration of leadership that is ethical is vital and very supportive of authentic leadership. Similar to what Shapiro (2015) contends, the focus of ethical

leadership herein will be values, virtues and decision making. In order to make decisions our school division needs to carefully examine our shared values and the virtues that guide our decision making. NTSD must be certain that we maintain our values so that all students are able to receive a quality k-12 education. Starratt (2005) suggests there are five domains of responsibility central to ethical leadership including: responsibility as a human being; responsibility as a citizen and public servant; responsibility as an educator; responsibility as an educational administrator; and responsibility as an educational leader (p. 132). NTSD leaders must accept the responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders wherever they fall in these domains honour their ethical responsibility to advocate for Mennonite students. Due to the Mennonite generational history and religion, it is probable that some Mennonite children may not ever be exposed to public education. It is incumbent on our division to reach out to Mennonite communities to explore whether attaining a public education may be desirable to them. I personally have developed great respect for Mennonite people because of their experiences with religious and political persecution, their steadfast religious values and their genuineness. Through being an advocate for Mennonites, it is hoped that acts of leadership are recognized and are influential in empowering others to join in and that collectively we can advocate for true educational partnerships with Mennonite families and communities. Shapiro (2015) and Starratt's (2005) work are literature sources which will continue to be important to the planning and implementation of this work.

### **Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice**

Learning more about Mennonite history, culture, and religion, will assist in advocating for Mennonite students and significantly increase Mennonite student registrations throughout NTSD. Several guiding questions emerge from the PoP: How many Mennonite school age

children living in the NTSD catchment area are not registered in NTSD? This information can likely be acquired by speaking with staff at private schools, members of church congregations, and speaking directly to Mennonites with whom connections have been built. Another emerging question is, do Mennonite groups feel uncomfortable registering in our schools and if so why? A third emerging question is: Do the various Mennonite groups have any interest or value in public education? Obviously the Mennonite families that have just recently registered in the division have expressed that they want a better quality education which for them includes following the provincial program of studies and graduating from high school. A fourth emerging question: Will other groups share this same vision and desire? Finally, the Mennonite families that just recently registered their children in NTSD all originated from Mexico and are they similar in their educational views as Mennonites who have emigrated from other countries?

### **Potential Influencing Factors Affecting the Problem of Practice**

In the fall of 2017 there was a trustee election resulting in five new trustees being elected. Although the previously elected trustees were supportive of the PoP, more time is needed to determine if the newly elected trustees are supportive. Another potential influencing factor affecting the PoP is there may be a lack of staff members interested in accepting a social justice perspective resulting in fewer advocates for Mennonites than actually required. In some Mennonite communities there may initially be limited opportunities to speak to Mennonite representatives due to their lack of exposure to public education. Many of the Mennonite elders speak German which our divisional leaders cannot speak, thus limiting the ability to communicate with them. Access to possible alternative programming may be problematic if surplus space is not found in some schools. Finally, financial restrictions for setup costs of new classrooms can affect the ability to satisfactorily carry out this PoP.



## **Perspectives on the Problem of Practice**

### **Historical Overview**

As discussed in the previous section, NTSD has been dealing with declining student enrolment for at least the last twenty-two years. Just as the percentage of Alberta's rural population has decreased over the last several decades (Statistics Canada, 2011) it has also decreased in the NTSD catchment area. As many of NTSD schools are situated in agriculturally based communities there has been an out migration due to smaller farms being purchased by larger scale farmers which means a reduction in student population in each community.

Although census data is not readily available on Mennonite settlement trends there appears to be an increase in the number of Mennonite families moving into NTSD's catchment area. While driving around the NTSD catchment area one can observe several new Mennonite churches, new Mennonite private schools, and new halls where congregated homeschoolers meet have been built. In some other cases Mennonite groups have rented older community halls where they hold church and congregate as homeschoolers. If NTSD schools have surplus classroom space it truly makes sense to offer this space to Mennonite communities for educational purposes as this can be provided at less expense than renting the halls and the surplus classrooms are often already equipped with school furniture in many cases.

### **Political, Economic, Social, and Technological (PEST) Factors Analysis**

To better understand NTSD and issues pertaining to educating Mennonite children, an analysis of key factors was undertaken. A PEST analysis revealed that there were four factors that had the greatest impact on this PoP and they were political, economic, social and technological. These factors require continued focus as change options are pursued within this OIP.

## **Political Factors**

Provincial policy enables Mennonite people to opt out of public education by approving registered private schools which are not required to teach the provincial programs of study nor employ instructors with provincial teaching certificates. Such schools exist in the NTSD catchment area and are minimally supervised. Parents often choose these schools for religious reasons and by registering their children in these schools they escape any follow up by government education officials. Many other Mennonite parents congregate their children as homeschoolers instead of making application for registered private schools. These sites greatly resemble public schools in that physically they are set up the same way with desks and some general reference resources along with curriculum that is usually religious based in its articulation. Not registering private schools makes it difficult for the Ministry of Education to monitor student progress and program delivery. Because Mennonite families have these options and many avail of them, NTSD along with other public-school divisions in our area miss out on this portion of the population as potential students. This is especially concerning as the number of Mennonites in our catchment area appears to be on the rise.

As divisional staff have had limited exposure to Mennonite populations, they likely have limited skills in dealing with Mennonite students and their families. Furthermore, due to limited interaction with Mennonites, some staff may possess attitudes which limit productive educational partnerships with NTSD.

## **Economic Factors**

With an annual student enrolment decline of approximately 2% means that continually NTSD is losing approximately \$600,000 annually of government revenue as we are funded approximately \$10,000 per registered student. Generally, NTSD is losing students annually as

families are having fewer children and families are moving away for employment reasons. If greater numbers of Mennonite students registered in NTSD schools we would be able to either increase student enrolment or at least stabilize it. Historical NTSD annual student enrolment counts as of September 30 are attached in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**NTSD Annual Student Enrolment Count as of September 30**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Student Enrolment Count</b>
1995	4067
1996	4055
1997	3927
1998	3932
1999	3817
2000	3708
2001	3700
2002	3656
2003	3544
2004	3424
2005	3369
2006	3431
2007	3392
2008	3292
2009	3305
2010	3158
2011	3222
2012	3108
2013	3070
2014	2978
2015	2889
2016	2990
2017	3041

## **Social Factors**

Culturally, Mennonite children and their families do not value secondary education and often drop out of school after completing grade 9 which is confirmed by Crocker (2013) when she indicates that the norm is for OCM students to conclude schooling when they reach 14 years of age. This is also the norm in NTSD in that Mennonite students usually do not continue

beyond grade 9. An economic downturn at this time represents fewer jobs available for grade 9 graduates. Thus, competition between work and school is lessened and we can advocate more determinedly for the advantages of a strong education.

As mentioned earlier one church congregation has chosen to discontinue congregating as homeschoolers and register their children in a NTSD school due to an overall dissatisfaction with the quality of their child's education and recognition that their children will need a high school education in order to be successful in our society.

### **Technological Factors**

NTSD traditionally has been a leader in educational technology within the province. In the beginning stages of schooling many Mennonite parents are often averse to technology being present in classrooms. By and large Mennonites see themselves as living separately from the world, Good Gingrich (2013). In order to live out their religious principle of living separately from the world, they do not wish their children to have access to computers for fear of accessing the internet. Accessing the internet would mean that they are not remaining separate from the world but rather being worldly. Mennonite families who recently registered insisted as a precondition of enrolment that we had to rid all their classrooms from computers. Traditionally NNS parents refused to send their children to NNS if there were computers in the classrooms. Several years later, these parents now accept computers at their school and the school has as many computers as any other school in our division. The gradual acceptance of computers in classrooms is hopeful as many of our schools are so small that online delivery of education is a necessary part of our existence.

## **Analysis of Internal and External Data**

As previously noted in **Table 1** NTSD's student enrolment has declined 25% since the 1995 amalgamation of the two school divisions. As the school division's student population steadily declines, there is a revenue loss as school divisions are funded based on student count. A loss of school revenue usually results in program reduction as well as staff reduction. Prolonged student enrolment decline can eventually result in school closure should the Board of Trustees choose to implement the school closure policy.

## **Leadership Focused Vision for Change**

### **The Existing Gap between the Present and Future State**

Over at least the last twenty-two years the student enrolment in NTSD has declined by approximately 25%. By partnering with additional Mennonite communities for the provision of education the division's vision will be more successfully attained. Through a hybrid of authentic, distributed, and ethical leadership being practised by school board trustees and all senior and school leaders the division should be well positioned to close the gap between the current and future state sought by carrying out improvement planning. The current gap exists because of the lack of knowledge that trustees and administrators have of Mennonite history, culture and religion. By acquiring greater knowledge of Mennonites and accepting a social justice advocacy for Mennonite students NTSD should be quite successful in increasing Mennonite student enrolment.

### **Priorities for Change**

The first priority for change is to increase trustee and divisional staff knowledge of Mennonite history, culture and religion. By providing trustees and divisional staff with

knowledge of Mennonites, the division can do a better job of ensuring appropriate accommodations are made that will attract Mennonite parents in registering their children in divisional schools or at least agreeing to register as homeschoolers with the division. After trustees and divisional staff gain greater knowledge of Mennonites it will be important to explore a variety of educational partnerships with the various Mennonite communities. Successful exploration and development of educational partnerships will have the ultimate outcome of increasing student enrolment across the school division. Another priority is to work with OCM students and families to explore alternative programs they might be interested in pursuing. As a school division it is helpful to take a critical look at alternative programming as suggested by Brubacher (2016):

By having a better understanding of LGS Mennonite views on alternative education programs and education in general, schools can become places that LGS students and their families regard as inclusive, safe, and reflective of their unique experiences and identity” (p. I).

As noted by Brubacher (2016) a number of school districts in south western Ontario including Waterloo Region District School Board, Avon Maitland District School Board, and Upper Grand District School Board all offer successful alternative educational programs for especially secondary Mennonite students and this division would be wise to learn from these Ontario school districts.

### **Envisioned Future State**

Through the implementation of the OIP, it is hoped that the division will arrive at an understanding that a social justice perspective will be required to bring in as many Mennonites as possible to the school division. NTSD should at least stabilize its student enrolment population and alleviate the 2% annual decline. There should be an increase in the number of Mennonite students enrolled in NTSD and an increase in the number of schools having Mennonite students

enrolled. Ideally NTSD will have an increase in the number of schools having educational partnerships with Mennonite communities. Hopefully as NTSD experiences increased success with establishing educational partnerships with several Mennonite communities the division will establish policy that will ensure partnerships are maintained and that the educational, cultural, and religious needs of Mennonite students are maintained. If the needs of Mennonite students are to be met, it will require divisional staff to be culturally proficient in their interactions. The goal is to enable these students to achieve academic success at or above the divisional average and maintain a desire to graduate from high school.

### **Organizational Change Readiness**

It is routine and familiar to have Mennonite students registered and attending NTSD schools. The concept of registering OCM students, previously enrolled in Mennonite private schools or formerly homeschooled is relatively new and a factor of significant change for many stakeholders. Building educational partnerships with Mennonite communities usually requires accommodations at existing public schools. In two of the division's schools Mennonite students receive High German language instruction which is the language used in their church worship. Based on their previous experience, teachers and principals from these two schools can provide leadership in building effective partnerships between the school and the Mennonite communities. In one school Mennonite students participate in religious devotions daily for twenty-five minutes. Similar accommodations may be required to attract and retain new Mennonite student registrations at other schools.

Prior to embarking on significant change within NTSD, it will be important to administer the change readiness questionnaire with trustees and school and central office administration (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 108-110). Recently, it was clear that trustees were resistant to accommodations being made for Mennonite students at one of our schools which resulted in

senior management needing to be very hands on at that school. Time will not permit the same degree of engagement by senior management at other schools. It will be necessary to assess readiness in advance of change. Further analysis of the results to the change readiness questionnaire will result in delineating areas where the division is ready for change and areas where further work will be required prior to change. Special attention will need to be given to areas where the division is not ready for change.

### **Internal and External Forces that Shape Change**

Prior to developing educational partnerships with Mennonite communities, it will be necessary to consider both the internal and external forces that shape change. With respect to the internal forces it will be necessary to explore the views on the problem of practice and the proposed changes held by senior management (including the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning and Assistant Superintendent of Learning Supports), trustees, school administrators, parents, and the general public.

The external forces needing to be explored include Mennonite clergy and elders, Mennonite views of public education, Mennonite Central Committee (Alberta), and actual partnerships with Mennonite communities. Through one conversation at a time, a representative of each Mennonite community will be engaged in conversations concerning the possibility of forming an educational partnership with the division. Through the positive relationships already established between senior management and some Mennonite community leaders other connections can be established with additional Mennonite communities.



## **Diagnosing Change: Bolman and Deal's Reframing Theory**

The first theory to be used in diagnosing the need for change is Bolman and Deal's (2013) reframing theory consisting of the four frames through which to view the school division: structural, human resources, political and symbolic. I now consider the division through each of these frames:

A review of Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame indicates that such items as divisional policies, administrative procedures, business practices, transportation boundaries, and program choice will provide useful information for analysis and problem solving purposes. Our school division has traditionally relied upon long standing policies for direction in governance and administration so careful attention will need to be given in these areas in order to facilitate change without upsetting many stakeholders.

Bolman and Deal's (2013) human resources frame focuses on people and relationships which is vital as we seek to study Mennonites who are a unique cultural and religious group. Establishing positive relationships built on a high degree of trust is essential for Mennonites to want to work with a public school division especially since they have spent considerable years avoiding public education. In carrying out this OIP, it will be continually necessary to focus on people and relationships especially while working with Mennonites and with our own employees, students, parents and community members as we share information about easily misunderstood cultural and religious practices.

In considering the political frame, one looks at such matters as positional power, networking and building coalitions, bargaining and negotiating. So far administrator and trustee experiences with Mennonites have been reliant on these traditional aspects. Experience thus far

has confirmed that Mennonite parents want to see the Superintendent of Schools and their local trustee on a regular basis. While they are quite prepared to work closely with the school principal and school staff, Mennonite parents seem to want to network, bargain and negotiate with senior administration and governance. These matters will need to be closely monitored while carrying out this OIP.

Within the symbolic frame there is an emphasis on symbols, meaning, belief, faith, culture, ceremonies and shared values. Mennonite culture is heavily influenced by their religious beliefs, faith, and ceremonies so all educational partnerships formed with Mennonite communities will always need to consider these matters. By continually adhering to items within the symbolic frame Mennonites are more likely to build trust and eventually aspire forming educational partnerships.

### **Diagnosing Change: Lewin Stage Theory of Change**

A second change theory to be used to diagnose change in this OIP is the Lewin Stage Theory of Change (Cawsey et al., 2016, pp. 44-47; Burnes, 2004, pp. 985-986). As mentioned in Cawsey et al. (2016) and Burnes (2004) the Lewin Stage Theory of Change includes the stages of unfreeze, change and refreeze. This theory will prove helpful in this OIP in that as Mennonite culture, religion and history become more understood, it will be necessary to unfreeze numerous policy and practices as part of a change process. Cawsey et al. (2016) suggest, “when the unfreezing occurs, the people who are embedded in the systems become susceptible to change”, (p. 45). After policies, administrative procedures, and practices have been changed and stakeholders have begun to accept changes the division can advance to refreeze so that changes can become a part of normal divisional operations.

Anticipating that not all school communities will be as supportive of Mennonite students registering as one school had been in September 2016, it will be necessary to be prepared with tools that can adequately diagnose and analyze site by site problems.

The first tool to be used in diagnosing and analyzing problems is a force field analysis. A force field analysis is “a process of identifying and analyzing the driving and restraining forces impacting an organization’s objectives” (Cawsey, et al., 2016, p. 196). A force field analysis would be used in each community where an educational partnership between Mennonite families and our school division is being considered so that any forces for or against change brought on by the partnership can be identified (Cawsey, et al., 2016, p. 196). The force field analysis is appropriately designed to be used in the unfreeze stage. In some cases, educational partnerships with Mennonites and our school division may result in special accommodations being made within our local school and this may be viewed as segregation by some stakeholders. Some of our stakeholders may also feel that resources being used on Mennonite students detract from resources that could otherwise be available for already registered students. Careful consideration will need to be given to all the dynamics of each potential partnership within our school division as obviously senior management and trustees favour such partnerships where some community members may resist. As suggested by (Cawsey et al., 2016) we will need to ask the question “How will these factors assist or prevent change?” (p. 199). By doing the force field analysis our senior leadership team and affected school principals will be able to identify key individuals for building coalitions and partnerships. After conducting a force field analysis, we would implement a stakeholder analysis. A stakeholder analysis is defined by Cawsey et al., 2016 as:

A process of identifying the key individuals or groups in the organization who can influence or who are impacted by the proposed change and then of working with those individuals or groups to make them more positive to notions of change. (p. 196)

A stakeholder analysis would be used to identify those who can affect the change or who are affected by the change (Cawsey et al., 2016). As groups of congregated homeschoolers or those attending private schools will come to the fore, it will be necessary to determine who to approach to discuss a potential educational partnership. While exploring potential Mennonite groups, consideration will need to be given to their wants and needs. It will be important to remember the history of Mennonites with respect to avoiding public education. If we are too aggressive pursuing educational partnerships with them, it can be a deterrent to them ever partnering with us. If an educational partnership includes Mennonites moving into an existing school where they require any accommodations, setting them apart from already attending non-Mennonite students, may result in resistance by different stakeholders in the community, for a variety of reasons. On a continual basis, it will be important to identify stakeholders who resist development of educational partnerships with Mennonites and be able to move those resisters or late adopters along on the change adoption continuum by working with them to prevent them from becoming significant obstacles to developing partnerships. It is anticipated that by continuing to focus on authentic leadership, demonstrating the value of all students receiving a public education, and explaining how our divisional funding for all students is positively impacted by having increased student enrolment; NTSD will be able to convince stakeholders of the benefit of increasing educational partnerships with Mennonites.

## **Conclusion**

NTSD has been experiencing an approximate 2% decline in student enrolment for at least the last twenty-two years. In recent years there appears to be an increase in the number of Mennonites who have moved into the NTSD catchment area and unfortunately, they have not tended to register their children in the public school system. In general Mennonite families tend

to register their children in private schools or as homeschoolers with systems other than local public systems. In the next chapter, the planning and development of the organizational change required in attracting Mennonite families to NTSD is discussed.

## **Chapter Two – Planning and Development**

### **Overview of Chapter**

Chapter 1 of this organizational improvement plan (OIP) introduced the organization and its problem of practice (POP). Chapter 2 will discuss the framework for leading the change process, a critical organizational analysis, possible solutions to the PoP, leadership approaches to change, and communicating the need for change.

### **Framework for Leading the Change Process**

When first deciding upon this PoP: “How NTSD will strategically address its student enrolment decline and advocate for Mennonite student education by successfully working with local Mennonite communities to ensure that NTSD is meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Mennonite population within its school system”, a perspective of neoliberalism as defined by Harvey (2005) was used: “A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). A neoliberal perspective was chosen due to market economics (Ryan, 2012) in that NTSD has struggled with declining student enrolment for well over two decades which has significantly reduced the division’s funding from government. An increase in Mennonite student enrolment would benefit the entire division as the province funds education based on a per pupil funding model.

A radical humanist and radical structuralist view frames this PoP. Both radical humanist and radical structuralist paradigms are underpinnings of the critical paradigm which supports a

social justice perspective. Hartley (2010) suggests that within a radical humanist paradigm one concerns himself with “gathering and using experiences to improve practice” (p. 275). By knowing what Mennonites find offensive we become knowledgeable about the accommodations necessary to attract parents to register their students in our schools. Burrell & Morgan (1979) suggest radical humanism is concerned with overthrowing or transcending limitations of existing social arrangements. This paradigm also subscribes to radical change and emancipation from a subjectivist standpoint (p. 32) which enables reflective review of Mennonite culture and timely response to the various cultural needs of the diversified Mennonite groups.

Through the radical structuralist lens we tend to see the world from an objectivist standpoint. Like the radical humanist paradigm, the radical structuralist paradigm subscribes to radical change and emancipation but within a context of structural domains instead of humanist domains. Mennonite religion sets their followers apart from the rest of the world. In order to enroll their students in our schools, we must be willing to modify existing school structures to suit their religious and cultural needs.

Faubert (2016) suggests the critical paradigm “is grounded in the belief that social change can be achieved through the emancipation and transformation of individuals and society” (p. 1). He further suggests that leaders require great commitment to social justice and transformative change. Furthermore Kellner (2003) suggests that because life is constantly changing, a critical theory is necessary in education as social conditions evolve. Traditionally, NTSD has not had anyone advocate for Mennonite students and their families. Shields (2004) suggests that there is a need for more transformative leaders who are prepared to advocate for increased student success by engaging in moral dialogue which will facilitate development of strong relationships, replace pathologizing silences, challenge existing beliefs and practices, and ground educational leadership in some criteria for social justice. NTSD leaders must be prepared to lead from the

critical paradigm on behalf of Mennonites and possibly face political and social pressure for doing so. The political and social pressure may stem from stakeholders who oppose of Mennonites being afforded special religious privileges in a public school system.

The relevance of authentic leadership has become very clear in the preparation of this OIP. Avolio et al. (2003) define authentic leadership “as a positive construct, descriptive words include genuine, reliable, trustworthy, real and veritable” (p. 248). So far, in the relationships NTSD has with a couple of Mennonite communities, both parties practice genuineness, reliability, trustworthiness, and are very real with one another. Begley (2006) suggests that authentic leadership is a hopeful, open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances (p. 570). This is especially relevant when considering possible educational partnerships with Mennonite communities. School leaders choosing to work with Old Colony Mennonites (OCMs) will need to be reflective and authentic in their leadership practices. Begley (2006) suggests that school leaders must strive to develop sensitivity to the values orientations of others in order to give meaning to the actions of students, teachers, parents and community members they interact with (p. 585). Values held by members of Mennonite congregations are often distinct from values supported by public school systems. Therefore, it is necessary for school leaders to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the values of various Mennonite communities in order to be successful in making the accommodations to both attract and retain Mennonite student registrations in public schools.

Mennonite communities are themselves diversified in nature due to different religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds existing in the various communities. Due to such great diversity, the changes required in each community prior to educational partnerships being established may be very complex. Alavi and Gill (2017) suggest, “Complex change requires high levels of commitment, hope, confidence, and resiliency among those who lead and support

complex change, because the complex change process may encounter obstacles” (p.158). Due to the complexity of required change, authentic leadership is a promising model. The required change includes great effort, highly involved change agents, and continuous learning amongst leaders which is greatly aligned with authentic leadership. Similarly, Avolio and Gardner (2005) offer that self-transcendent values such as social justice play a significant role in developing authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is very relevant to not only the leader but to the followers as well.

As a social justice perspective is integrated into this work, it will be necessary to include professional development around Mennonite history, culture and religion. Stakeholders will need to understand Mennonite history, culture, religious beliefs, and the religious persecution experienced by Mennonites which reflects their views on public education. These understandings are necessary in order to advance educational partnerships with especially OCMs. Such understandings will make the required accommodations very clear in order to pave the way for educational partnerships to be established with Mennonites.

Leaders who wish to foster a social justice advocacy for Mennonites will need to be open-minded to alternative programming especially for high school. As noted by Brubacher (2016) school leaders who have a better understanding of Low German Speaking (LGS) Mennonite views on alternative education programs and education in general will be able to ensure that schools are more inclusive, safe and caring relative to the Mennonite culture and religion.

Given that our Board of Trustees approved the granting of such accommodations as High German language instruction, devotions, and segregated classes for Mennonite students at one of our public schools in September 2016, it seems that NTSD is open to a social justice perspective being advocated for Mennonites as educational partnerships are explored. Recently, five new



trustees were elected to our board so they will need to receive professional development on Mennonite history, culture and religion to fully determine if they are supportive of social justice advocacy for Mennonites as well.

### **Critical Organizational Analysis**

Within this OIP, the political frame will be used to assist in understanding the gap between NTSD's current organizational state and vision. Considering Bolman and Deal's political frame, there are five main assumptions to note (2013, p. 188-189). These political assumptions, relevant to all organizations are summarized in Table 2 below along with corresponding issues relevant to NTSD Mennonite communities. Following Table 2 each political assumption and its corresponding issue within NTSD Mennonite communities are discussed. Table 2 serves to further illustrate how such critical organizational analysis is relevant to this OIP.

**Table 2**  
**Political Assumptions Compared to Mennonite Issues in NTSD**

<b>Political Assumptions (Bolman and Deal)</b>	<b>Issues in NTSD Mennonite Communities</b>
Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.	Currently NTSD's student enrolment consists of approximately 30% Mennonite population and there may be approximately 700 Mennonite students who either are home-schooled or attend German private schools.
Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.	Mennonite communities within NTSD's catchment area differ in their values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality from the majority of NTSD's main population.

Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources – deciding who gets what.	The main initial driving force for this OIP was a scarcity of resources due to a 25% decline in student enrolment since 1995.
Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.	Provision of accommodations for Mennonite students may restrict resources available for non-Mennonite students which could be the source of conflict.
Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests.	Current Mennonite communities practice bargaining and negotiating strategies for the provision of student transportation and facility usage for community purposes.

**Adapted from (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 188-189)**

NTSD's experiences so far with a couple of Mennonite communities enable us to draw the above-mentioned parallels. These matters will need to be closely monitored while carrying out this OIP.

NTSD consists of twenty schools serving eleven communities. The student population consists of approximately 30% FNMI, 8% Mennonite, 2% Hutterite, and the balance is Other (Statistics Canada, 2011). With such diversity already existing in our student population and 8% of our students being Mennonite, our population is inclusive and is open to accepting a multicultural population. Although none of our teaching staff are Mennonite, we do have several Mennonite support staff who help ensure that Mennonite student needs are met.

With an apparent growing number of Mennonites in NTSD's catchment area there is an increasing coalition in that there are greater numbers of different individuals and a growing interest group within the school division. Due to the increasing presence of potential Mennonite students living in NTSD's catchment area and the decline in non-Mennonite students in the catchment area, there should be an increasing interest in attracting the Mennonite students and their families to enroll with NTSD in either a part-time or full-time capacity. Within this

coalition power and conflict can be prevalent. Certainly, there is a gap in student enrolment that could be filled by having greater numbers of Mennonite students enroll in NTSD.

Coalition members within NTSD have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality. As educational leaders, we must remember that due to religious persecution experienced by Mennonites and a culture that hasn't tended to value public education that any potential educational partnerships with Mennonites must carefully consider what appears to be important to their culture, beliefs and values. Good Gingrich (2016) suggests that Mennonite children in Canada generally attend school until the age of twelve or thirteen. Even younger children attend school quite irregularly as they are busy in the fields helping out in peak harvest seasons (p. 29). Mennonites may have differing views from us on student attendance and high school completion and we need to be careful not to impose our educational values and beliefs on them. Many Mennonite families especially those originating from Mexico will have sporadic attendance practices and may value the maintenance of their way of life over high school completion.

Based on Mennonite culture, beliefs, and values varying from that of non-Mennonite students, it is necessary that our staff accept that Mennonite students may only be available to attend school on a part-time basis. For some Mennonite communities, we may wish to explore a Mennonite program within a regular school, other partnerships may be full integration within a school, and some partnerships may be that of accommodating Mennonite students as congregated homeschoolers within existing school space.

Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that if there are scarce resources, conflict will be rampant. With increased conflict rises a competition for power. NTSD must ensure that conflict and power are well managed so that accommodations can be afforded to Mennonite students as without the accommodations registration will be limited by this population. Well defined

protocols and communication channels will need to be developed in cases where Mennonite communities choose to access surplus school space to congregate as homeschoolers while also using spaces shared with full-time school students. In order to avoid conflict school staff will need to collaborate with parents of homeschoolers so that gymnasium usage and CTS lab usage is maximized for both groups. Careful attention will have to be given to scheduling, student discipline policies, student supervision schedules, administration of fees, bus riding privileges, student field trips, sports teams, school functions such as assemblies and the composition of school councils. Each school staff will have to become familiar with Mennonite history, culture and religion.

Our current experience with Mennonite communities has taught us that bargaining and negotiating are very important for the well-functioning of relationships. This is why authentic leadership is so important. While providing our school principals with professional learning regarding Mennonite history, culture and religion, it will be important to also include bargaining and negotiating skills. These skills are relevant to work with the Mennonite culture but are also valuable leadership assets for work with other community stakeholders.

A force field analysis can be used in diagnosing and analyzing organizational problems and is “a process of identifying and analyzing the driving and restraining forces impacting an organization’s objectives” (Cawsey, et al., 2016, p. 196). As per (Cawsey et al, 2016) forces acting in a situation need to be identified and their strength need to be estimated. Short and long term forces need to be considered. Secondly, forces need to be understood so that they can be altered to accommodate the required change. Thirdly, within a force field analysis one would look beyond the immediate impact of the change and identify ways to increase support and reduce resistance (p. 197). A force field analysis would be used in each community where an educational partnership between Mennonite families and our school division is being considered

so that any forces for or against change brought on by the partnership can be identified (Cawsey, et al., 2016, p. 196). As NTSD has schools in eleven communities and Mennonites seem to have settled in or near all these communities, it may be necessary to administer the force field analysis in eleven different settings. In some cases, educational partnerships with Mennonites and our school division may result in special accommodations being made within our local school and this may be viewed as segregation by some stakeholders. This may be offset by explaining to the stakeholders the history and religious dynamics of the Mennonite community so they understand why accommodations are required to attract Mennonite students to our schools. NTSD will need to establish a social justice perspective in support of Mennonite students in order to meet their educational, religious and cultural needs so that they choose to register in our schools and continue attending for as long as their parents support their attendance. Some of our stakeholders may also feel that resources being used for Mennonite students detract from resources that could otherwise be available for already registered students. This may be offset by referencing (Ibrahim, 2015) who suggests that in order to have equity, sometimes this requires special treatment for some groups (p. 51). Special treatment will likely be required to attract Mennonite students to register in our schools. By explaining to stakeholders that each registered student in NTSD accounts for extra dollars that can in part be used for the benefit of all division students, this pressure can be alleviated. In addition to the extra revenue, stakeholders should be advised that all of our schools should be inclusive and as suggested by Shields (2014) we should be asking whether we “are writing off certain groups of students who come from historically less dominant socioeconomic, religious, or ethnic groups or whether all students are actually achieving to high similar levels” (p.324). By adopting a focus on social justice, NTSD will be able to ensure that the division “calls out for equity and inclusion for all” (Shields, 2014, p. 328) which will increase the opportunity of meeting the educational needs of Mennonite students. Careful consideration will need to be given to all the dynamics of each potential partnership

within our school division, especially where senior management and trustees favor such partnerships and other community members resist. As suggested by (Cawsey et al., 2016) we will need to ask the question, “How will these factors assist or prevent change?” (p. 199). Our senior leadership team and affected school principals will use a force field analysis in each potential partnership to identify those people who need to be concentrated on.

By using a force field analysis our divisional leaders will be able to assess the various forces for or against the necessary changes required in this OIP as they relate to each community. The assessment will help determine how the forces may need to be altered to produce an atmosphere that is more conducive to change. Furthermore, as resources are always limited it will be important to appropriately allocate resources to the change process. Finally, the force field analysis will also allow school leaders to consider the consequences of required changes and work towards reducing risk and resistance.

Through administration of the force field analysis, it will be beneficial to consider each force for and against change separately. As mentioned by (Cawsey et al., 2016) it is important to consider the four types of change including: continuous change; high resistance change; discontinuous or breakpoint change; and sporadic or flip-flop change (p. 198-199). Continuous change would be that which is changing constantly. High resistance change are areas where there is great resistance to change, often resulting in no change. Breakpoint change includes change where pressures are significant and the resistance is strong. In this situation resistance prevents change until the driving force is intensive causing a breaking point where a change results. When forces are weak and change events are not important, change can cause a situation to switch back and forth or flip-flop (p. 198-199). By considering the type of change one is able to determine where to focus change efforts.

Early in the implementation of the OIP, it will be necessary to provide school principals with historical, cultural and religious background on Mennonites. This information is necessary prior to assisting principals in developing leadership skills for social justice which will be required in order to form educational partnerships that respect Mennonite culture and religion.

During the October 2017 trustee election five of seven trustees elected were new and newly elected trustees may not support the proposed educational partnerships as depicted in this OIP. In order to mitigate this limitation, it will be necessary to educate new trustees on aspects of Mennonite history, culture and religion so that they too can become social justice advocates for Mennonite students and their families. Also, it will be essential to ensure trustees understand the history of declining enrolment in our school division and how it translates to loss revenue leading to declined student programming.

As many Mennonites have a lack of exposure to public education there may be limited access to some Mennonites to discuss education. In this case, the Bourdieusian Theory (Eacott, 2013) will prove helpful in that we will eventually build relationships around other contexts besides education which will hopefully lead to eventually being able to develop educational partnerships with Mennonite communities.

The first language for Mennonites is German and because none of our educational leaders speak German, we will struggle to speak with the elders who usually don't speak English. If this is a continuing problem we can use some of the German speaking people who have offered to translate in assisting with this OIP. Another solution could be that some of our existing Mennonite employees (support staff) who speak German can be asked to assist with translation services.

Although many of our schools have surplus classroom space, some do not and in these schools, we may not have adequate space for alternative programming geared towards Mennonite students. It will be necessary to work with principals to explore creative use of school space or it may be possible to rent space in closed business buildings.

In order to attract Mennonite student registrations, we will need to be innovative in providing program accommodations such as devotion time, High German language instruction, and alternative programming at especially the secondary level. The school division is already exploring alternate secondary programming similar to what exists in school districts in south western Ontario. It may be beneficial for a divisional administrative team to visit these secondary programs to learn from their experience.

Setting up new classrooms has definite setup costs and as we already have declining student enrolment which translates to loss revenue, this can become a financial burden making change difficult. In order to work around this, it may be necessary to encourage schools to share surplus furniture, equipment and supplies. We must also remember that with new student registrations we will attract new revenue which can help offset the increased costs associated with setting up new classrooms.

Shifting the culture of the division to be very enabling of part-time and full-time Mennonite students in all our schools will take intentional work. Often new Mennonite student registrations are from families who have just moved into town. In some cases, it may be their first time registering in a public school system. It will certainly be important for all staff to ensure that these students and their families feel welcomed and cared about at all levels of the school.



If NTSD wishes to experience success in attracting Mennonite students and their families to our schools we will need to be creative in how we help them become comfortable enough with our staff and our school buildings so they enter into educational partnerships.

### **Possible Solutions to Address the PoP**

Based on best practices and a literature review on Mennonite history, culture, and religion, the four following suggestions are offered as potential solutions to the decline in student enrolment, the desire to attract OCM families to NTSD schools, and becoming a social justice advocate for Mennonite families:

- 1) provide school principals with professional development on Mennonite history, culture and religion;
- 2) enable part-time or full-time Mennonite student registrations in NTSD schools;
- 3) provide accommodations for Mennonite students in NTSD schools; and
- 4) develop preferred classroom/school rental agreements for Mennonite communities.

#### **Solution One - Provide School Principals with Professional Development on Mennonite History, Culture and Religion**

Early in the implementation of the OIP it will be necessary to provide school principals with historical, cultural and religious background on Mennonites. A presentation covering Mennonite history, culture and religion has been prepared to be used in principal professional development sessions. This information is necessary prior to assisting principals in developing skills of leadership for social justice which will be required in order to form educational partnerships that respect Mennonite culture and religion. The article “What is Inclusive

Leadership?” (Ryan, 2015) will be used in a group study with principals to help them understand the leadership skills needed to apply a social justice stance.

Throughout NTSD there are a number of Mennonite sub-communities. Currently there are approximately one hundred fifteen Mennonite students attending NNS. Some of these students are OCMs whereas the majority identify with the Rhinelander church. Both groups tend to differ significantly in their cultural and religious beliefs and practices. As staffs learn more about the religious and cultural beliefs of each group it will better enable schools to address programming needs for students and families.

Another significant Mennonite group who has chosen to register their school aged children with NTSD is OCMs originally from Chihuahua, Mexico. In collaboration with two Education Superintendents who have been appointed by that OCM church congregation, the staff has been provided with historical, cultural, and religious background information that enables that staff to ensure the cultural and religious needs of those students and families is respected. Through respectful understanding of this OCM group this school staff has appropriately adjusted school culture and procedures which satisfy the parents resulting in those parents being content to send their children to our school. Adopting similar solutions amongst other Mennonite communities within NTSD should lead to increased Mennonite students registering.

Although this solution is necessary for NTSD educational leaders to become knowledgeable of Mennonite history, culture and religion, it is not complete enough to ensure that educational leaders accept a social justice leadership position for Mennonite students and their families. In schools where low numbers of Mennonite students register, principals will not be as practiced in adopting a social justice perspective which may result in parents feeling that their children’s cultural, religious, and educational needs are underrepresented.

## **Solution Two - Enable Part-time or Full-time Student Registrations in NTSD Schools**

Given the increase in the number of Mennonite families that have moved into the NTSD catchment area, it is reasonable to expect that some of these families will enroll their children in our schools on either a part-time or full-time basis. As NTSD has already been able to accommodate the cultural, religious, and educational needs of some Mennonite communities it seems hopeful that other Mennonite families may be willing to access some of our other schools for the educational needs of their children. Currently, Mennonite students who have registered with us, all follow the provincial program of studies while being full-time students. In the case of part-time student registrations, those parents may request that a completely religious based curriculum be provided. Upon such a request, NTSD will need to explore how to most effectively deliver this curriculum and make a determination as to who will oversee such curriculum. This arrangement may result in two different staffs operating out of one school which may have threats as well as opportunities.

Current school utilization rates (calculated by dividing the total school instructional area capacity by the student enrolment) in NTSD schools are relatively low resulting in most of our schools having a surplus of classroom space. Rather than having empty classrooms we should offer them to Mennonite communities for the education of their children. As previously mentioned there is already precedent established whereby through a divisional willingness to make accommodations for Mennonite students, one community has agreed to register their students full-time in one of our schools. In other areas of the division where either private schools have been established or homeschooled students have congregated it may be possible to have students register in our schools on a part-time basis. Often times, private schools and buildings used for congregated homeschooled students are not equipped with resources such as a gymnasium, career and technology (CTS) labs, and individual classrooms. As many of NTSD

schools are equipped with such resources Mennonite communities could be enabled to register their children part-time in our schools to access those resources while maintaining their registration in either their private schools or as homeschoolers.

The above noted solution is quite viable given that the majority of our schools have surplus classroom space. Providing segregated classroom space may be a problem in a couple of schools where space is limited. In schools where space is limited, students may only be able to register part-time and not on a full-time basis. In cases where classroom space is limited, Mennonite students wishing to register full-time in segregated classes may have to register in a school with different grade configurations. In other words, if grade k-4 Mennonite students wish to enroll and the regular k-4 school does not have surplus space they may have to enroll in a junior or senior high school which can be a significant deterrent especially if Mennonite students are registering for the first time in a public school.

The above noted solution holds great promise within this OIP. In order to be successful, it will need to be coupled with another solution.

### **Solution Three - Provide Accommodations for Mennonite Students in NTSD Schools**

As the vision for NTSD is “first choice for students: We are a dynamic learning community focusing on student success” it is reasonable to expect that we should reach out to Mennonite families and provide them with caring learning environments. As suggested in Brubacher (2016), by making accommodations at our schools, schools can become places that Mennonite students and their families regard as inclusive, safe and caring, and reflective of their culture and religion.

One of the accommodations that we already have in place in two of our schools is that we provide High German language classes. In both schools, parents had requested that the school

provide High German language instruction. As previously stated in Chapter 1 High German is the language often used in Mennonite church services and the provision of continuing reverence to their faith is very important. High German language instruction is being offered reasonably successfully in our schools which should mean that it can be an accommodation provided at other schools. One of the challenges in providing High German language instruction is attracting qualified teachers.

One of our schools currently provides Mennonite students with religious devotions as an accommodation. Parents had requested that in order to register their students in one of our schools they wanted their students to begin and end their day by having time for devotions. Currently students at this school are accommodated with twenty minutes of devotions in the morning and five minutes at the end of the day. Due to the success of this accommodation at one of our schools there is no reason why this shouldn't be provided in other schools.

Another accommodation provided at one of our schools is separate classrooms for Mennonite students. This accommodation can be provided in schools where there is a surplus of classrooms. Mennonite parents must understand that when separate classes are provided they must also be accessible to non-Mennonite students at the request of their parents. Complete access to all classes is provided for through legislation in the provincial school act, School Act (2000).

Although NTSD currently has one standard operational calendar for all schools, the division may need to consider alternate calendars for Mennonite communities. In one of our schools where Mennonite students have registered, their families are originally from Mexico. Some of these families return to Mexico in the spring of the year for family or employment reasons which results in some students missing over two months of school. As this type of student attendance is not conducive to maximizing student learning it may be worthy for the

school division to adopt alternative school calendars for those schools having Mennonite students to better meet their educational needs.

In communities where CTS labs are accessible NTSD may wish to provide alternative programming at especially the high school level to attract OCM students back to school who had previously graduated from grade nine or for students who had completed all their schooling through private schools or through homeschooled arrangements. As suggested by Brubacher (2016) there are numerous alternative programming options provided for high school students in southwestern Ontario and it would be worthwhile for our school division to try to learn from those models so that we can accommodate more Mennonite senior high students in our schools.

If NTSD is to be true to its vision “first choice for students: We are a dynamic learning community focusing on student success”, this solution is most viable. If a social justice perspective is adopted throughout NTSD all of these accommodations should be possible. By practicing authentic leadership there is hope that the above-mentioned accommodations can be negotiated with the Mennonite communities that request them.

The challenge with providing accommodations as a solution is the varying degrees of acceptance of a social justice perspective by principals. Principals are crucial to ensuring that accommodations are established with Mennonite communities. Principals who are able to model authentic leadership will be more successful in establishing positive relationships with Mennonite parents. Parents who trust the principal will feel more comfortable registering their children in our schools.

#### **Solution Four - Develop Preferred Classroom/School Rental Agreements for Mennonite Communities**

Currently NTSD has a schedule of rates guiding rental rates for classrooms, gymnasiums and other rooms in schools. Where possible the division should consider offering preferred classroom/school rental rates for Mennonite communities.

In many NTSD communities where Mennonites have settled in or near, our schools are often the only community facility with a gymnasium. Mennonites sometimes wish to use a school gymnasium for athletic events, concerts, craft sales and funerals. Hopefully by having preferred rental agreements with Mennonites they will be encouraged to access our schools. Hopefully through accessing our schools, Mennonites will develop increased comfort with our facilities and our staff leading to eventually partnering with our schools for educational programming.

As previously mentioned, many of our schools have surplus classrooms due to declined student enrolment. These classrooms should be made available to Mennonite families who may be interested in using those spaces to gather as congregated homeschoolers.

NTSD could concentrate on offering private Mennonite schools with preferred rental rates for gymnasium use, access to CTS labs, commercial kitchens, and any other special facility usage available in our schools. With our low school utilization rates these spaces in our schools can be rented during times they are not used by our regular students which means that regular school programming does not need to be interrupted for such rentals.

As suggested by Good Gingrich (2013) some Mennonite parents are ambivalent about preserving and transmitting their traditional way of life, especially their traditional language, to their young children (p.10). Some parents view participation in public schools and the requirement to learn English as undermining the nuclear and extended family as well as the Mennonite culture and religious heritage. However, some parents also realize that too much

emphasis on their traditional language, culture and religion does not serve their students well if they wish to prosper in Canadian society. Partial integration of Mennonite children in our public schools is plausible for the reasons listed above.

This solution will be challenging to implement as it requires a special privilege through policy exemption. If Mennonite communities receive reduced rates for facility rentals while other groups do not, the school board is likely to experience great resistance. In order to mitigate such resistance, it may be necessary to strike joint use agreements with Mennonite communities as necessary.

Developing preferred classroom/school rental agreements for Mennonite communities is somewhat problematic for the reasons mentioned. This solution will likely be unsuccessful especially in the early stages of implementing this OIP. As the number of educational partnerships with Mennonites increase, this solution may become increasingly practical.

Although at least three of these solutions hold promise for success, a hybrid of solution two and three are recommended for this OIP. By providing accommodations for Mennonite students and their families, NTSD should be able to increase the number of part-time and full-time student registrations in division schools. If all the Board's educational leaders adopt an authentic leadership perspective, Mennonite parents will likely establish trust with our school communities resulting in a willingness to partner with NTSD for educational reasons.

### **Leadership Approaches to Change**

Authentic leadership will be used as the leadership approach to change in this PoP.



Begley (2004) suggests “Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration” (pp. 4-5).

Beginning in August 2016, NTSD commenced meeting with members of one Mennonite church congregation resulting in them registering ninety-one students in one of our public schools. One of the main reasons members of the Mennonite church congregation approached NTSD was because of our reputation of demonstrating authentic leadership.

Authentic leadership is an important leadership approach in this OIP for a number of reasons. As Alavi and Gill (2017) suggest that “Authentic leadership may contribute to the implementation of complex change when change success requires continuous effort, hope, and resilience by change agents, especially because of failures and iterations that may occur during complex change” (p. 168).

Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, and Avolio, (2010) offer that authentic leaders display four types of behaviors including balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and self-awareness (p. 902). Balanced processing involves objectively analyzing all relevant information before making a decision. Mennonite communities are so diverse in their cultural and religious backgrounds so balanced processing will be essential before making decisions on the nature of the educational partnership being established. Internalized moral perspective includes the leader behaviors that are guided by internal moral standards and value, rather than those that are based on external factors. These internal moral standards are significant in guiding interaction with Mennonite communities on such a sensitive topic as participating in public education. Relational transparency involves making personal disclosures, such as openly sharing information and expressing true thoughts and feelings. This behavior has already proven to be vital in the interactions NTSD has had with Mennonite

communities. As Mennonite people often do not understand English very well it is important to be transparent, concise, and to refrain from being subtle. Self-awareness pertains to the extent that leaders understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and motives, as well as recognizing how others view their leadership. Mennonite parents often interpret our language very differently from our intent so it is important to be careful in how we communicate. By being self-aware there is a greater chance that we will be able to be more effective in our communication and our relationships with the various Mennonite communities which will be vital to the implementation process.

In applying authentic leadership, it is expected “that authentic leaders will influence follower self-awareness of values/moral perspective, more based on their individual character, personal example, and dedication” (Avolio and Gardner, 2005, p. 330). These traits are evident in the leadership/follower example existing in the school where ninety-one Mennonite children registered in 2016. Northouse (2016) suggests a three-perspective definition of authentic leadership evidenced in the above leadership/follower example:

It can be conceptualized intrapersonally, developmentally, and interpersonally. The intrapersonal perspective focuses on the leader and the leader’s knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept. The interpersonal perspective claims that authentic leadership is a collective process, created by leaders and followers together. The developmental perspective emphasizes major components of authentic leadership that develop over a lifetime and are triggered by major life events (p. 220).

Each of these perspectives are evidenced in the above noted example as NTSD leaders including the school principal, Superintendent of Schools, Transportation Manager, and Director of Support Services interact with our Mennonite communities. Such interaction between all these individuals is evidence of the interpersonal perspective comprising authentic leadership as a collective process, created by leaders and followers together. As educational leaders wishing to establish educational partnerships with Mennonites, we must recognize the need for some interdependence of Mennonite history, culture, and religion. Through understanding Mennonite

history we will be able to lead from a perspective of regulation whereby Mennonite cultural and religious practices will be respected and honoured. All of these intrapersonal perspectives will help NTSD leaders be in a position to adopt a social justice perspective in dealing with Mennonite communities. Educational leaders within NTSD will develop authentic leadership traits over time as we are motivated to meet the educational needs of Mennonite students.

As suggested by Bogotch (2015) adopting a social justice perspective in our schools would mean that any improvement programs would have to extend into the lives of students in that school (p. 132). NTSD principals would have to ensure that curriculum is continually modified so that it reflects relevance for Mennonite students based on their cultural and religious beliefs. Furthermore, as discussed by Theoharis (2007), within social justice leadership the school principal needs to consider structures that will better enable students to reach success. As will be discussed in the next section, NTSD may need to adopt a different school calendar if large numbers of Mennonite students are absent from school for prolonged periods of time due to family and cultural reasons.

Alavi and Gill (2017) contend that authentic leaders enhance an organization's readiness for change. Authentic leaders create a sense of urgency which increases an organization's readiness for change (p. 164). Authentic leaders are successful in effectively communicating the need for change which makes this form of leadership well suited for this OIP.

### **Communicating the Need for Change**

Through our student information system, we are able to identify the number of currently enrolled Mennonite students. As new Mennonite students register we will be able to measure/track the number of new registrations. Furthermore, through our financial software we will be able to measure the increased revenue and expenses involved in registering increasing

numbers of Mennonite students. As Mennonite students often graduate after grade 9 it will be interesting to track Mennonite students that continue beyond grade 9 and hopefully continue to qualify to graduate from grade 12.

Mennonite parents of students who already registered at a NTSD school in 2016 are very happy with their children's progress and parents are reporting that the children are learning far more than they ever learned while being homeschooled. They are particularly happy to see how much progress their children have made in reading. Throughout the school year the education superintendents, elected by their church congregation have been made to feel very comfortable with voicing any concerns. Concerns expressed have been resolved satisfactorily through reasoned conversation.

As Mennonites believe in being separate from the world they are not keen to communicate openly about successes that they have with education. To this point, we do not communicate externally about partnerships that are formed or the academic successes that our students have. Internal communication will be essential especially as we frame change within the OIP.

Bolman and Deal's (2013) reframing theory consisting of the structural, human resources, political and symbolic frames has been used in this OIP. In light of the four frames and their impact, it will be necessary to continually communicate with trustees, staff, students, parents, and community members about the changes that are being made and why.

Within the structural frame; policies, administrative procedures, business practices, transportation boundaries and program choice will be reviewed. Informing all relevant stakeholders why the review is occurring so that they will know why questions are being asked and will be in a more informed position to respond will be important. If changes are made to

any of the above, it will be important that everyone be aware and have a clear understanding so that the community feels they are being well informed.

Using a human resources frame which focuses on people and relationships is essential to building positive relationships with Mennonite communities. It is important that trustees and divisional staff are made aware of the groups that partnerships are being formed with so that they can be well positioned to support building and fostering such relationships.

Applying the political frame, it is necessary to review such matters as positional power, networking and building coalitions, bargaining, and negotiating. From current dealings with one Mennonite group it is evident that the parents and especially the education superintendents elected by the church have come to expect certain things from the Superintendent of Schools. They expect to discuss with the Superintendent of Schools such matters as overall student discipline, funding, building usage and often sensitive matters referred to them by other parents. As further partnerships are established it will be necessary to ensure that school principals use their positional power to be able to establish good communication channels with the Mennonites. Mennonites rely quite heavily on networking and building coalitions, bargaining and negotiating when partnering with them. Through these political interactions one can learn a great deal about Mennonite culture and religion which can be communicated to trustees and staff so that greater numbers of positive partnerships can be established.

The symbolic frame includes such matters as symbols, meaning, belief, faith, culture, ceremonies and shared values. Because all these matters are important to Mennonites, it will be important to seriously consider all of them while working with Mennonite groups. Our experience to date has caused us to take care respecting religious beliefs and constantly communicate with the education superintendents to ensure that any of our symbols and ceremonies do not interfere with their religious and cultural beliefs.

In terms of actual communication strategies in this OIP, as suggested by Armenakis and Harris (2002), three change message conveying strategies consisting of persuasive communication, active participation, and managing internal and external information (p.171) will be used.

Persuasive communication may include speeches, newsletters, memos, and oral presentations. It will be necessary for school principals to ensure that where possible all change messages even if they are written that they be presented orally as often Mennonite parents struggle with reading English.

Armenakis and Harris (2002) suggest that active participation can take three forms; enactive mastery, vicarious learning, and participation in decision making (pp. 171-172). Enactive mastery includes gradually building skills, knowledge, and efficacy through successive involvement and participation. Enactive mastery closely aligns with authentic leadership as a successful communication approach with Mennonite students and their families. Vicarious learning includes observing and learning from others which is closely tied to the leader/follower relationship modeled in authentic leadership. Successful communication of change will occur through building relationships with Mennonite parents and through involving both parents and superintendents in shared decision making.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter two consists of planning and development for the changes required in NTSD in order to strategically address its student enrolment decline by successfully working with local Mennonite communities to ensure that the school division is meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Mennonite population within its school system. The framework for change in this OIP is comprised of a critical paradigm. The political frame was used to conduct a critical

organizational analysis. A hybrid of two possible solutions was suggested to address the POP. Authentic leadership was offered as a leadership approach to change. Several suggestions were made for communicating the need for change including applying Bolman and Deal's (2013) reframing theory.

In the next chapter, a change implementation plan, process for monitoring and evaluation of change, ethics and organization, process communication plan, and next steps and future considerations are discussed.

### **Chapter Three – Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication Overview of Chapter**

Chapter 3 includes a design of a Change Implementation Plan including methodology for monitoring and evaluating the success of proposed changes. A comprehensive change process communication plan and ethical considerations of the change are discussed as both contribute to the overall success of the change implementation plan and this OIP.

#### **Change Implementation Plan**

Since beginning to develop this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) I have had to read extensively about Mennonite history, culture and religion as I knew so little about Mennonites. Historically Mennonites have experienced considerable persecution and as suggested by Bowen (2010) when Mennonites first arrived in Canada they were promised that they could educate their children in a manner befitting their customs and beliefs (p. 552). Becoming advocates for students in our Mennonite community through infusing a social justice lens in our problem solving will better ensure that their educational needs are addressed while respecting their strongly held customs and beliefs.

The use of Kotter's well-established Eight Stage Process of Change (Kotter, 1996, in Cawsey et al., 2016) will assist us in meeting the cultural and religious needs of Mennonite students who register in its schools. Careful adherence to each of the eight stages will ensure that other chosen change tools such as a force field analysis and stakeholder analysis are successful in reaching the goals of this OIP. The force field analysis has the strength of helping to identify those forces for and against the intended change (Cawsey et al., 2016, p196). Recently, numerous Mennonite families from one Mennonite church congregation registered in one of NTSD's public schools. These families approached NTSD to initiate an educational partnership at a school that was not structurally ready to accept the four additional classrooms that were required. Through a stakeholder analysis we were able to assess exactly what the Mennonite parents wanted in order to register their students with us. We were also able to assess that the residents already living in the community were open to welcoming the newly registered students as they saw it as a means of keeping their school open.

NTSD now has two schools consisting predominately of Mennonite students whose parents are satisfied that their customs and beliefs are appropriately considered. New staff to these schools receives orientation to Mennonite culture from the school principals; one of whom has lived in a Mennonite community for many years and the other who taught Mennonite students prior to becoming the school's principal. Local Mennonite staff are also quite helpful in educating non-Mennonite staff on Mennonite history, culture and religion.

Good communication is required for the success of organizational change. As I am the Superintendent of Schools and the main change leader in this OIP, trustees will be consistently updated on the status of planned change in this OIP. Furthermore, as school principals will be key players in implementing change and they report directly to the Superintendent of Schools, clear communication regarding the OIP between the Superintendent of Schools and principals is



vital. As school principals become knowledgeable of Mennonite history, culture, and religion, they will educate their staff so that they are able to meet the educational needs of Mennonite students who choose to register in our schools.

### **Assumptions**

As many Mennonites believe in setting themselves apart from the world (Good Gingrich, 2013) they tend to isolate themselves from main functions adhered to by non-Mennonites. For example, it appears that Mennonites fail to complete census data or they fail to understand questions being asked through such a process resulting in very limited census data on Mennonites being available. Due to the limited availability of census data on Mennonites it can only be presumed that there are increased numbers of Mennonites in the NTSD catchment area because the number of Mennonite churches, Mennonite schools, and places where Mennonite children congregate for home schooling has increased over the last several years.

Another assumption being made is that numerous Mennonite communities will aspire to establish educational partnerships with NTSD. The recent community that partnered with NTSD did so because they were not satisfied with their previous arrangement for education of their children. Encouraging other Mennonites to partner with NTSD may be a challenge especially given that Mennonites have avoided public education for so long.

The previous Board of Trustees were supportive of the planned changes included in this OIP. The October 2017 school board election resulted in five of seven trustees being new so it can only be assumed at this time that they are as supportive of this OIP as the previous board.

### **Proposed action steps, timelines and resources**

In the fall of 2018 trustees will receive a presentation from the Superintendent of Schools on Mennonite history, culture and religion. Following the presentation to trustees and subject to their approval in principle of the OIP, the same presentation will be shared with all school and central administrators. Following the presentation to administrators and during the 2018-19 school year, follow-up one on one meetings will be scheduled with principals who believe they have Mennonites living within their school boundaries and are interested in partnering with Mennonite communities. The Superintendent of Schools will facilitate professional development (PD) with school principals on bargaining and negotiating which will be necessary for establishing effective educational partnerships with Mennonite communities. Inter-visitations will be established with schools and districts in Canada where successful partnerships exist between public education and Mennonites. Staff will be provided with Mennonite conference opportunities hosted by Mennonite Central Committees of Alberta and Ontario, University of Winnipeg and other institutions that may provide PD that will be helpful in establishing a clearer understanding of Mennonite history, culture and religion.

In each community desiring an educational partnership with Mennonites, Bolman and Deal's (2013) political frame will be used to help frame an analysis process. Such an analysis will hopefully identify who the Mennonite community leaders are, determine whether there are hopeful signs that an educational partnership can be formed, and determine if there are any political threats to forming an educational partnership and how to best mitigate those threats. Following the Bolman and Deal (2013) political analysis, a force field analysis as defined in Chapter 1 (Lewin, 1951 and Thomas, 1985) will be used in each community desiring an

educational partnership. Force field analyses will be led by each principal in partnership with the Superintendent of Schools. Through its use each principal will be able to determine those forces that exist which prevent the change and then determine whether there would be support in moving forward with a partnership. After implementing a force field analysis, a stakeholder analysis as defined in Chapter 1 will be implemented if a partnership is deemed potentially successful. The stakeholder analysis will identify who the Mennonite leaders are, whether there is a will to form an educational partnership, and if so, what are the educational needs and desires of each specific Mennonite community. Prior to and during educational program implementation the Lewin Stage Theory of Change (Cawsey et al., 2016) will be used to govern necessary policy and procedure changes. We anticipate that some adjustments will need to be made to policies and procedures. Using the Lewin Stage Theory of Change, it may be necessary to unfreeze them to make necessary changes before they go through a refreezing phase again.

During the 2019-20 school year, program plans will be developed for Mennonite students. The program plans may vary for each established partnership. If a partnership is established with a Mennonite community that has never been exposed to public education it is likely that extra literacy support in addition to NTSD's existing literacy program will be required. Extra supports may need to be established based on gaps in student learning. Similar to an existing partnership, there will be a need to set up an advisory team of parents to represent the community beliefs, values and norms. Following the educational assessment in 2019-20 educational programs will be implemented during the 2020-21 school term.

### **Building Momentum**

Momentum will be built by illustrating to all stakeholders that increased student enrolment is supported with increased revenue. Furthermore, principals are usually motivated by our division's vision being fulfilled in ensuring that parents and students living in our catchment

area see our schools as “first choice”. In the one example where several Mennonite families have registered their children in one of our schools, staff are motivated by the opportunity to teach students who have registered for the first time in a public school. Staff report that this is a very rewarding professional opportunity. Teachers with experience teaching Mennonite students will be used to facilitate a divisional PLC for other teachers in other communities where educational partnerships with Mennonites are being implemented.

### **Limitations**

A significant limitation while implementing change as a part of this OIP is that Mennonite people, especially OCM’s first language is German while most of NTSD’s staff does not speak German. This language barrier may limit the success of various required changes within NTSD. One way to partially offset this limitation is to enlist the support of local Mennonites who speak German and understand the Mennonite culture.

As NTSD is a public school system, some stakeholders may resist making necessary accommodations required by Mennonites especially those that identify with different religious beliefs. Such resistance can be a significant impediment to change resulting in limited success of this OIP in some communities.

Another limitation to this OIP is time. As Mennonite communities are quite diverse, changes required in one school or community can be quite different from another resulting in a very diverse collection of strategies being required which can be very time consuming. It will be necessary to ensure that other members of the senior leadership team including the Deputy Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents will be available to assist in monitoring and evaluating change.

Many Mennonite students who may register in NTSD schools may present with special needs such as learning gaps due to limited provincial curriculum coverage while attending private schools or while being home schooled. Overcoming these learning gaps may require extra resources such as increased staffing and learning resources which will be a strain on NTSD's budget.

### **Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation**

Through careful alignment of Kotter's 8 Step Change Model (Kotter, 1996, in Cawsey et al., 2016) and the PDSA Cycle (Moen and Norman, 2009) the change process in this OIP can be carefully monitored and evaluated. Providing evidence and mobilizing a shared responsibility of effective and successful change will be essential in sustaining commitment from all stakeholders ensuring that NTSD is strategically addressing its student enrolment decline. As a division we will need to be working closely with the local Mennonite communities to ensure that NTSD is meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Mennonite population.

Table 3 below provides an overlay between Kotter's 8 Step Change Model and the PDSA Cycle.

**Table 3: Kotter's 8 Step Change Model and the PDSA Cycle**

<b>Kotter's 8 Step Change Model</b>	<b>PDSA Cycle</b>
Establish a Sense of Urgency (present an already prepared presentation on declining enrolment in NTSD and Mennonite history, culture, and religion to School Board Trustees)	Plan a Change
Create a Guiding Coalition (repeat the above presentation to central administrators and school administrators)	Plan a Change
Develop a Vision and Strategy (host follow-up meetings with school principals who aspire to build educational partnerships with their Mennonite community, this will also enable clarification of the vision and strategy relevant to the OIP)	Plan a Change

Communicate (present a summary of the OIP and share presentation on Mennonite history, culture and religion with other liaison groups that I have access to, use divisional email and the website to reach out to all divisional employees)	Plan a Change
Empower Employees (enable principals to present to their staffs on the vision and strategy of the OIP and where requested I can assist principals in presenting on Mennonite history, culture and religion)	Do – Carry out Change
Generate Short-term Wins (share the example of a school that has already partnered with a Mennonite community, facilitate inter-visitation to other Canadian school districts that already partner with Mennonite communities, and facilitate PD with Mennonite Central Committees of Alberta and Ontario and the University of Winnipeg. In schools desiring to partner with a Mennonite community an analysis using Bolman and Deal's (2013) political frame will be carried out. In communities where a partnership is being considered a force field analysis will be used. Stakeholder analysis will be used as necessary)	Study
Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change (study any developed partnerships between NTSD schools and Mennonite communities to learn from them so that partnerships can be established on a larger divisional scale)	Study
Anchor New Approaches (prior to and during Mennonite educational program implementation; policies, procedures, practices and divisional cultural norms will be amended to satisfy the learning needs of Mennonite students and their families)	Act – Adopt the Change

**Adapted from Cawsey, T. F., Deszca, G. and Ingols, C. (2016) and Moen, R. and Norman, C. (2009)**

The first phase of the PDSA cycle is to plan a change. This first phase aligns with the first four steps in Kotter's 8 Step Change Model. The first step of the change model is to establish a sense of urgency by presenting to the Board of Trustees on the decline of student enrolment over the last twenty-five or more years. The decline of student enrolment has resulted in a loss of revenue as school divisions are funded on the basis of an amount of funding per

student. This presentation will also include information on Mennonite history, culture and religion. Through this presentation the Board of Trustees should see the urgency of this change especially given that there is a strategy in the Board approved education plan whereby the Superintendent of Schools is required to reach out to students in the NTSD catchment area who do not access the division for their educational needs. This implementation strategy can be evaluated by the Board of Trustees voting whether to support the OIP. Further evaluation can consist of feedback on how effective the presentation is in educating the trustees about Mennonite history, culture and religion. Conversations with individual trustees and regular agenda updates at board meetings with opportunities for discussion will bring Trustee questions and concerns to the foreground.

The second step of the change model is to create a guiding coalition. The key people to support this OIP will be our school administrators. The above-mentioned presentation will be delivered to school administrators at a divisional administrators' association meeting. The success of this step of the plan will be evaluated by the verbal support received for this presentation as well as the number of principals who book a follow up one on one meeting to discuss their potential interest in partnering with a Mennonite community. Monitoring of this step will be achieved by checking in with all school principals to see if they wish to meet to further discuss how to establish an educational partnership with a Mennonite community.

The third step of the change model is to develop a vision and strategy. The implementation strategy supporting this step will be to host follow up meetings between school principals who aspire to build educational partnerships with their Mennonite community and myself as Superintendent of Schools or some other member of the Executive team. These follow up meetings will enable conversations leading to clarification of the vision and strategy relevant to the OIP. Evaluation of this step will be through an assessment of the number of principals

desiring to meet to discuss an educational partnership. An additional means of evaluation will be through the breadth of the follow-up conversations with principals. Through each conversation it will be possible to evaluate if there are significant numbers of Mennonites in the community and it will also become evident whether there are Mennonite leaders with whom each principal has the opportunity to network. This step will be monitored by the ongoing discussion and support given to principals by myself or a member of the Executive team.

The fourth step of the change model is to communicate. Through my positional power I am fortunate to be able to meet with many liaison groups consisting of teachers, support staff, bus drivers and school councils. While meeting with these groups I will engage group members with information and discussion on Mennonite history, culture and religion. In addition to engaging members in information and discussion on Mennonite history, culture and religion I will impart the significance of the division adopting a social justice advocacy for Mennonite students and their families. Other communication tools used will be information shared through divisional email and on the school division's website. The success of this step will be evaluated by feedback received from the communication strategies. Each of the liaison groups mentioned above have regularly scheduled meetings in which meetings are recorded and followed up. Through such follow-up one can evaluate how much the communication concerning the OIP is being repeated and just how much interest is developing in the OIP. Monitoring of this step will consist of initiating conversation across the division on stakeholder reaction to the presentations and their support for change.

The fifth step of the change model, empower employees aligns with the phase, 'do' in the PDSA cycle. This implementation change includes principals presenting to their school staffs on the vision and strategy of the OIP and where requested I can assist the principal with the presentation. Evaluation of this strategy will be the actual number of principals that present and



whether school staffs follow-up with educational partnerships after the presentation. During the presentation it will be advantageous to assess the amount of interest garnered from the presentation. For example, it will be important to note during the presentation if there are people resisting the change and to consider how they are being identified. How the principals are handling reservations will also be important to monitor. Another means of evaluation will be how quickly barriers to the change are identified and removed. Monitoring will be through ongoing conversation with various school staff members to gauge the enthusiasm for making changes so that Mennonite students are included in their schools. Such monitoring can include discussion at school staff meetings as well as liaison meetings.

The sixth step of the change model is to generate short-term wins which aligns with the study phase of the PDSA cycle. Numerous implementation strategies support this step. As NTSD already has one school where an educational partnership has been established; this model can assist principals in planning for a potential future partnership. This strategy can be evaluated by the number of principals who seek out information on this existing partnership. Furthermore, it can be evaluated by assessing the questions principals ask about the existing model. Another evaluative piece may include the level of conversation principals have with staff at the existing school where the partnership has been developed. Monitoring of this strategy can occur by having discussions with school principals about what they learned from the visit to the school where a partnership has already been established. Another strategy to be considered is visitations to other Canadian school districts that have established successful educational partnerships with Mennonite communities. While the cost may be significant, the value of this strategy can be evaluated through the actions principals take following a site visit to other jurisdictions. The best way to monitor the success of this strategy is to ensure that the learning acquired through such visits is shared with all divisional staff. The Mennonite Central

Committees of Alberta and Ontario as well as the University of Winnipeg are credible sources of PD on Mennonite history, culture and religion that can be accessed by numerous NTSD staff. The PD can be evaluated by tracking the number of schools that utilize new learning to establish partnerships in their communities. Monitoring of this strategy can be achieved by surveying attendees of the PD to determine which ideas taken from the PD are actually being implemented in their respective schools and partnerships. Another actionable strategy is a force field analysis (Lewin, 1951 and Thomas, 1985). This strategy can be evaluated based on a clear illustration of the forces for and against the change. Successful monitoring of the force field analysis can be achieved by identifying forces for and against and working with those forces until those forces are supportive of the change.

The seventh step in the change model is to consolidate the gains and produce more change and it aligns with the study phase of the PDSA cycle. This strategy consists of studying any already developed partnerships between NTSD schools and Mennonite communities to learn from them so that partnerships can be established on a larger divisional scale. This strategy can be evaluated by studying, observing, analysing, and discussing each partnership that is formed over time. For example, if something goes very well in one school it can help inform what happens in another school. Such evaluation of each partnership allows the school division to set appropriate goals for each succeeding partnership. Monitoring of this strategy will include studying each partnership in order to learn and adapt other planned partnerships.

The final step in the change model is to anchor new approaches which align with the act-adapt the change stage in the PDSA cycle. This step includes strategies at the highest level of the OIP where change is being institutionalized. Prior to and during Mennonite educational program implementation; policies, procedures, and divisional practices will be amended to satisfy the learning needs of Mennonite students and their families. This strategy can be assessed

by hosting focus groups with Mennonite parents to determine if they feel that their school and school division actually have policies, procedures and practices that support their children's learning needs. Successful monitoring of this strategy will include tracking and recording the divisional policies, procedures, and practices that were in place prior to the change and then after the change.

In summary, careful adherence to Kotter's 8 Step Change Model and the PDSA Cycle will serve as guidance for monitoring and evaluating the change process within this OIP. As each community may arrive at a very different partnership, it will be necessary to embrace change in a very flexible manner and as a leader accept the changes and use them to refine the overall change plan.

### **Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change**

Ethical considerations are a very important part of this OIP. Ethics is a significant part of authentic leadership which is the leadership approach to change in this OIP. Begley (2004) suggests "Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration" (pp. 4-5). When leading authentically, NTSD will require ethical leadership to be considerate of Mennonite history, culture and religion on a consistent basis. Ethical leadership is defined by (Angus, 2006) in (Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed, and Spina, 2015) as "a social, relational practice concerned with the moral purpose of education" p. 198. With ethics being so important in this OIP it will be necessary to lead from three themes of ethical inquiry as suggested by Starratt (1991) including the ethic of critique, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of caring.

Starratt (1991) suggests that the ethic of critique includes an organization's bureaucratic context and bureaucratic mindset (p. 189). As previously mentioned in both Chapter 1 and

Chapter 2 there are current structures within NTSD that will need to be considered for change in order to meet the educational needs of Mennonite students and their families. In order to register Mennonite students in our schools we may need to provide such accommodations as High German language instruction, devotional time and separate classrooms as well as classrooms that do not have advanced technology such as computers and internet access, and alternate operational calendars. This will require an ethically sound implementation plan as these structural changes deviate from the current norm and may draw public controversy especially if these classrooms co-exist in schools where the majority of already registered students are non-Mennonite.

In addition to the bureaucratic context the bureaucratic mindset is quite relevant to the ethic of critique. NTSD schools being traditionally structured are not currently designed to accommodate the educational needs of Mennonite students. The ethic of critique discussed in Starratt (1991) draws from critical theory (p. 189). This is especially relevant to this OIP as NTSD will be required to adopt a social justice perspective while addressing the educational needs of Mennonite students throughout the school division. A social justice perspective will be required in order to determine whether our current division contains racial and cultural biases against the Mennonite community. The ethic of critique is a valuable ethical tool in that it “forces administrators to confront the moral issues involved when schools disproportionately benefit some groups in society and fail others” (Starratt, 1991, p. 190). This inquiry is especially useful because as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, some of our leaders operate from a conservative ideology which closely aligns with a bureaucratic mindset.

Starratt (1996) in Ehrich et al. (2015) suggests that the ethic of justice is concerned with fair and equitable treatment of people (p. 163). Within this ethic, educational leaders refer to equity, equality, and equality of opportunity (Ehrich et al., 2015, p. 205). The ethic of justice

will be useful as NTSD endeavours to attract Mennonite students to register in our schools and as suggested by Ehrich et al. (2015) it is important to ensure that all students regardless of their personal, social, cultural or academic circumstances can learn and achieve (p.205). This will be especially important as each educational partnership formed with Mennonite communities will vary one from the other. It will be important to ensure that all students in a school, both non-Mennonite and Mennonite are treated in equitable ways. Schools of mixed and unique populations will pose a challenge for equity by fostering an ethic of justice in the school and the principal will be able to demonstrate a moral compass that guides his or her decision making.

Starratt (1991) suggests that the ethic of care “requires fidelity to persons, a willingness to acknowledge their right to be who they are, openness to encountering them in their authentic individuality, a loyalty to the relationship” (p. 195). The ethic of care is essential in carrying out this OIP. The PoP is how NTSD will strategically address its student enrolment decline and advocate for Mennonite student education by successfully working with local Mennonite communities to ensure that NTSD is meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Mennonite population within its school system which is closely aligned with the ethic of care. By adopting a social justice perspective for Mennonite students and their families, NTSD will demonstrate an ethic of care. We have to accept that our Mennonite population are authentically different due to their historical, cultural and religious beliefs and as suggested by Good Gingrich (2013) they see themselves as living separately from the world. By accepting that Mennonites are different, we accept an ethic of care which enables educational decision making that will benefit Mennonite students. Furthermore, as has been previously mentioned, the establishment of strong relationships (another aspect of the ethic of care) with Mennonites is required prior to establishing a successful educational partnership. Due to a long history that Mennonites have

had of being uninvolved in public education, the establishment of relationships outside of education will be necessary prior to an educational partnership being developed.

The three ethics, critique, justice and care work well together and will be essential in providing ethical leadership throughout this OIP. Starratt (1991) suggests “the three themes of ethics are not incompatible, but on the contrary, complement and enrich each other in a more complete ethic” (p. 198). All NTSD leaders will do well to be guided by these ethical themes as the division implements this OIP.

Another important aspect of ethical leadership in this OIP is to protect the anonymity of involved stakeholders. Each Mennonite community tends to vary and the solutions carried out in one community may significantly vary from another. Mennonites tend to prefer to live separate from the world so they often do not wish to be compared to another group or community. It will be important to respect their anonymity as educational partnerships are developed. It will be a challenge for educational leaders to avoid referencing partnerships in other communities. Throughout the OIP, pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the school division and all its stakeholders. By quoting the divisional mission statement and the vision, the reader is able to determine the location and name of the school division. My name and title, Superintendent of Schools, can be attained through a Google search.

### **Communication Plan**

Implementing change successfully across an organization requires an effective communication plan (Elving, 2005). Cawsey et al. (2016) suggest that a communication plan is necessary to ensure that the stakeholders will understand the need for change, establish support for change, minimize the effect of rumours, and understand the actual change (p. 320). Prior to implementing this OIP it is essential to have solid support from school board trustees. To

establish and monitor support from trustees I will use the application of the five key change message components by Armenakis and Harris (2002). Following the five key change message components I will use a management communication strategy for change by Klein (1996) as a communication plan for this OIP.

Armenakis and Harris (2002) suggest that the five change message components include: discrepancy, efficacy, appropriateness of change, principal support, and personal valence. Discrepancy (Armenakis and Harris, 2002) suggests that stakeholders must see a discrepancy from a current state to a future state in order to be motivated to change. By demonstrating to trustees that student enrolment has declined 25% since 1995, the number of Mennonite students living in our catchment area appears to have increased, the revenue to be gained by Mennonite students registering with NTSD and the need to be social justice advocates for Mennonites; I expect trustees will support this OIP. Efficacy (Armenakis and Harris, 2002) includes having sentiments regarding the ability to succeed with change. This is an important component for all stakeholders and is especially crucial that our Board of Trustees are supportive of this change from the outset of this OIP. If trustees have resistance to the change it will be beneficial to identify their concerns and work to resolve those concerns. As one Mennonite community has already partnered with NTSD, trustees are likely to believe that other communities will partner with the division. Mennonite parents in this one community could be asked to share testimonials of the values of the Mennonite/NTSD partnership with trustees if needed. Appropriateness of change (Armenakis and Harris, 2002) is an important component in that although trustees may agree that change is required they may disagree with the specific change being proposed. It will be important that trustees be invited to approve each school or community strategy as one can be very different from another. Principal support (Armenakis and Harris, 2002) is achieved if the change is believed to have the required resources and commitment to see it through to action. As

trustees will review and approve each school's program plan they will be in a key position to assess program viability. Personal valence (Armenakis and Harris, 2002) is the component where an individual asks the question 'what's in it for me'. A trustee may resist the change if they feel their self-interest is challenged (Armenakis and Harris, 2002, pp. 170-171). Adherence to these key change message components is a strategy to ensure the Board of Trustees' commitment to the change process and that an effective communication plan is in place for their benefit. Trustee support is necessary for the success of this OIP.

Klein (1996) suggests that the following communication principles when used together are a good communications strategy: message redundancy is related to message retention; the use of several media is more effective than the use of just one; face-to-face communication is a preferred medium; the line hierarchy is the most effective organizationally sanctioned communication channel; direct supervision is the expected and most effective source of organizationally sanctioned information; opinion leaders are effective changers of attitudes and opinions; and personally relevant information is better retained than abstract, unfamiliar or general information (p. 34).

### **Redundancy of message and medium**

In order to form effective partnerships with Mennonite people that will lead to the development of educational partnerships it will be necessary to communicate in a variety of ways and to repeat the message several times especially considering that Mennonites first language is something other than English. PowerPoint presentations can be useful as long as word choice is kept to a level that does not exceed their level of understanding. To date the Mennonites that I have dealt with appear to prefer story form (using a story to illustrate an important point) which is also culturally relevant. Due to language barriers that Mennonites (usually German speaking people) have with English speaking people it will be necessary to repeat key messages on a



regular basis. Key messages can be repeated at parent meetings or by asking the Education Superintendents to repeat school messages in German at church meetings.

### **Face-to face- communication is most effective**

As Mennonite people have a limited ability to speak English, face-to- face communication will be most effective. Current dealings with Mennonite parents lead me to believe that they struggle to read literature sent out by NTSD and they usually avoid reading letters and other sources of print that are sent home. Face-to-face communication is also essential in relationship building and in discussing formal education when many parents have never participated in formal education so the concept is very abstract to them. Planning for student programming is especially suited to face-to-face conversation and does not lend itself very well to print form. Where necessary some of the pertinent educational information could be translated from English to German for the ease of understanding for parents.

Currently NTSD works closely with two Mennonite Education Superintendents (elected by the church) to augment communication with parents. These two Superintendents would equate to what Good Gingrich and Lightman (2004) refer to as informal community helpers. Informal community helpers are those people in OCM communities who are Mennonite and they act as communication liaisons between the local people and outside service providers to the community.

### **Line authority is an effective communications channel**

Mennonite parents seem to prefer to communicate with persons in authority. Earlier in the section: Diagnosing Change, Bolman and Deal's Reframing Theory 2013, Chapter 1, positional power as per Bolman and Deal (2013) was discussed and it was made clear that

Mennonite parents and community leaders like to discuss educational matters with either the Superintendent of Schools or their local school board trustee.

### **The supervisor is a key communicator**

School principals will be key communicators of change within this OIP so it will be important that they become knowledgeable of Mennonite history, culture and religion so that they can be well equipped to establish educational partnerships with Mennonites within their school's catchment area. Principals will be required to educate their staff on Mennonite history, culture and religion. They will need to impart to their staff the knowledge required to develop appropriate accommodations and alternative programming for students. As staff have greater proficiency in English, principals may use PowerPoint presentations, print articles and appropriate videos that depict Mennonite culture. Local Mennonite leaders may also provide knowledge of Mennonite history, culture and religion to school staff.

### **The use of opinion leaders**

An important part of this OIP is to motivate as many NTSD staff as possible to become social justice advocates for Mennonite students and their families. An article by Ryan (2015) entitled "What is Inclusive Leadership?" will be used as part of a group study with principals to help them understand the leadership skills needed to apply a social justice stance. This is important as many Mennonite students have never attended public school and it is a generational issue. If staffs become social justice advocates for Mennonite students, these students will feel cared for and will want to attend our schools.

### **Personally relevant information is better retained**

Visiting other schools or school systems where alternative programming and accommodations are being made for Mennonites will be very beneficial to staff who have a responsibility to develop special educational programming for Mennonite students. Visiting other schools where best practices for instructing Mennonite students are already developed will be a good communication strategy as this will be personally relevant for those that investigate such best practices.

In summary, during the fall of 2018 I will share the vision for change which will begin with educating trustees and NTSD administrators that over the last twenty-two years the student enrolment in NTSD has declined by approximately 25%. Given the apparent increase of Mennonites in NTSD's catchment area it would be helpful to partner with Mennonite families for education. NTSD's vision is "First choice for students: We are a dynamic learning community focusing on student success". By partnering with additional Mennonite communities for the provision of education, the division's vision will be more successfully attained in that increasing numbers of students will view NTSD as "First Choice".

## **Conclusion**

Chapter three consists of a change implementation plan, process for monitoring and evaluation of change, ethics and organization, process communication plan, and next steps and future considerations are discussed. Kotter's Eight Stage Process of Change will be used to lead the change required in this OIP of strategically addressing NTSD's student enrolment decline by successfully working with local Mennonite communities to ensure that the school division is meeting the cultural and religious needs of the Mennonite population within its school system. Numerous strategies will be deployed to address increasing part-time or full-time Mennonite student registrations and providing accommodations for Mennonite students in NTSD schools so that students will register in our public schools. An overlay between Kotter's Eight Step Change

Model and the PDSA Cycle will be used to monitor and evaluate the change process. A thorough communication plan guided by Armenakis and Harris' (2002) five change message components and Klein's (1996) communication principles will guide the OIP.

### **OIP Conclusion, Next Steps, and Future Considerations**

This OIP addresses the declining student enrolment problem in NTSD by closely examining Mennonite history, culture and religion in order to strategically address the educational needs of Mennonite students so that these students feel that NTSD is a "First Choice" for their educational needs. By adopting a social justice perspective in favor of Mennonites, NTSD staff should be able to make the necessary accommodations required in its schools to attract and retain Mennonite students. Prior to establishing educational partnerships with Mennonites it may be necessary to explore ways to build partnerships through other relationship building strategies such as the Bourdieusian perspective, Eacott (2013) leading to establishing trust amongst Mennonite people in the various communities.

One educational partnership has already been established in one of the NTSD schools and it is progressing very well. This educational partnership is quite helpful in establishing momentum for this OIP. The key factor in the success of the existing partnership has been the adoption of an authentic leadership framework. Working with our existing Mennonite communities has required continuous effort, hope and resilience which will be needed throughout complete implementation of this OIP.

In the coming months it will be useful to research the location of other Mennonite communities throughout the division's catchment area. As locations are identified, by working with Mennonite contacts already established we will try to identify Mennonite leaders in these newly located communities. After identifying these new Mennonite communities and their

leaders it will be beneficial to read literature explaining their culture and religion as there are so many different Mennonite groups with varying cultural and religious backgrounds. Efforts should also be made to network with people in these newly identified communities as establishing a social connection with these community members will expedite the development of educational partnerships with them. By establishing connections with Mennonite leaders and our divisional educational leaders in each community, a social justice advocacy for OCM students will be established leading to increased enrolment in our schools.

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